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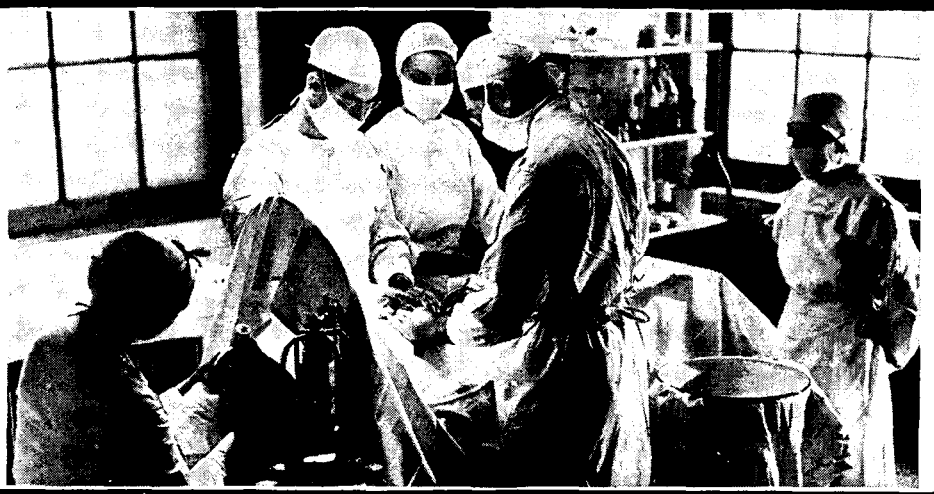

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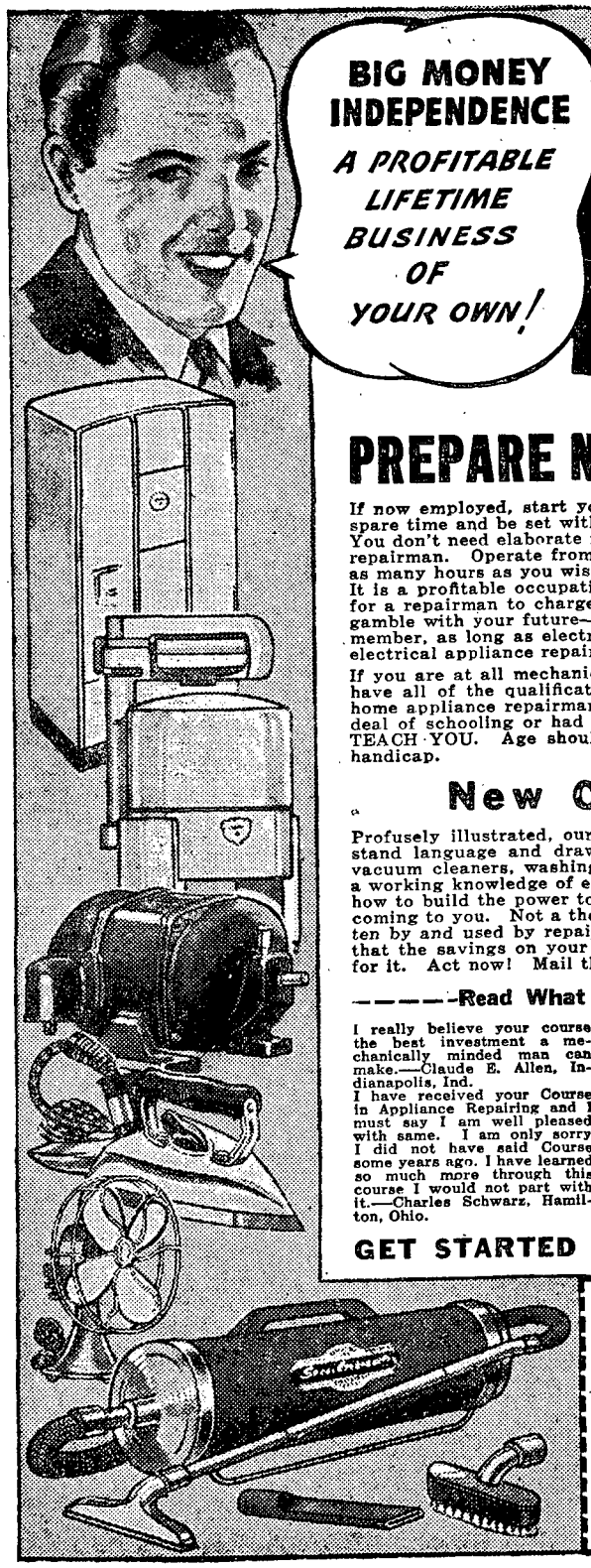

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Front cover painting by Arnold Kohn, illustrating a scene from "Cult Of The Eagle"
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JULY 1946

VOLUME 8 NUMBER 3

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The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

THE sad news comes to us of the recent death of one of the most popular writers of all time in FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. We know that you will feel the loss of Leroy Yerxa as keenly as his editors do, and that you will long remember many happy hours given us by his fine stories Your editor especially feels that he has lost something, because Leroy Yerxa was one of our own discoveries, and became the great writer he was through our own careful coaching. An editor's greatest pride is in a writer he helped to make great. And the passing of Leroy Yerxa is correspondingly a very great loss. He was the "little man's" writer.

PERHAPS it is fitting that we present David Wright O'Brien's last story for FANTASTIC ADVENTURES in this issue. "The Softly Silken Wallet" is one of those stories only Dave could write, and the kind Leroy Yerxa always claimed "belonged" to the King. O'Brien was the king of fantasy fiction to Yerxa, and some of his best stories were patterned after the style of Dave O'Brien. They were two grand lads!

ROBERT BLOCH, after a long absense from these pages, brings back his very popular character, Lefty Feep, the goon than whom there is no gooner. This time he's turning into a tree, and the laugh's on you!

SO POPULAR was Richard S. Shaver's first fantasy "An Adam From The Sixth" in our last issue, that we are giving you another short bit from his typewriter called "The Tale Of The Last Man." It is one of those very satisfactory short-shorts that are very hard to write, but once written, can be picked out of your memory years later. Of the Adam story, we have never seen such instantaneous acclaim. You have named "An Adam From The Sixth" as a modern classic of Fantasy Fiction.

THOMAS P. KELLEY is a name new to our pages, but his story "He Who Saw Tomorrow" ought to convince you that something new is something good. We are delighted to present another "first" which we predict you'll place near the top.

WILLIAM LAWRENCE HAMLING sometimes writes the kind of a story that makes him look like a genius. "Jimmy Takes A Trip" is one of those stories. It ought to jerk at your heart strings like no other fantasy ever has. It's got that eerie quality of emotion that Edgar Allan Poe was sometimes able to put into his stories, minus the sheer horror of those old masterpieces, which is all to the good.

OUR cover story this issue is "Cult Of The Eagle" by Berkeley Livingston, who has recently been getting a great number of fan letters from you readers. Livingston is perhaps the most improved writer on our staff, and we expect truly fine work from him in the future.

THE other day we got a letter from J. W. Pelkie, explaining that he was neither a helpless invalid, nor had a dead mother on his hands. We were baffled at this letter from the author of the Toka caveman stories until we saw an article in one of the writer's magazines painting as sad a picture as has ever been painted. Somebody must have been having their "fun" but the funniest part of it all was that we felt so bad about the whole thing that we almost sat down and offered Pelkie a dollar a word for a million-word novel. However, all kidding aside, we have some more manuscripts to read, and maybe Toka will be back soon. It's been hard to find a hole in the magazine recently, which won't be too large until we get paper and printers to return to our long-awaited monthly schedule.

STARTING next month, one of your favorite authors, William Lawrence Hamling, will be aiding us to get FANTASTIC ADVENTURES to you on time by becoming a member of the staff. So, if we print a story that isn't so hot in the future, drop Hamling a pan letter—because he'll be to blame and not your editor.

ONE of the reasons (and say it isn't funny!) is that your editor recently had a baby daughter in the family, and he was so rushed for time to do a good job on FANTASTIC ADVENTURES that he called for help, and the help made good!

FANTASTIC ADVENTURES now has another sister magazine, a new one called "Mammoth Adventure" and it's on sale right now. You might find it a good deal to rush out and buy a copy, because a lot of your old friends are writing for it. William P. McGivern, for instance, Chester S. Geier and Berkeley Livingston for more instances, and that means if you like this magazine, you'll like that one. Try it and see.

Rap

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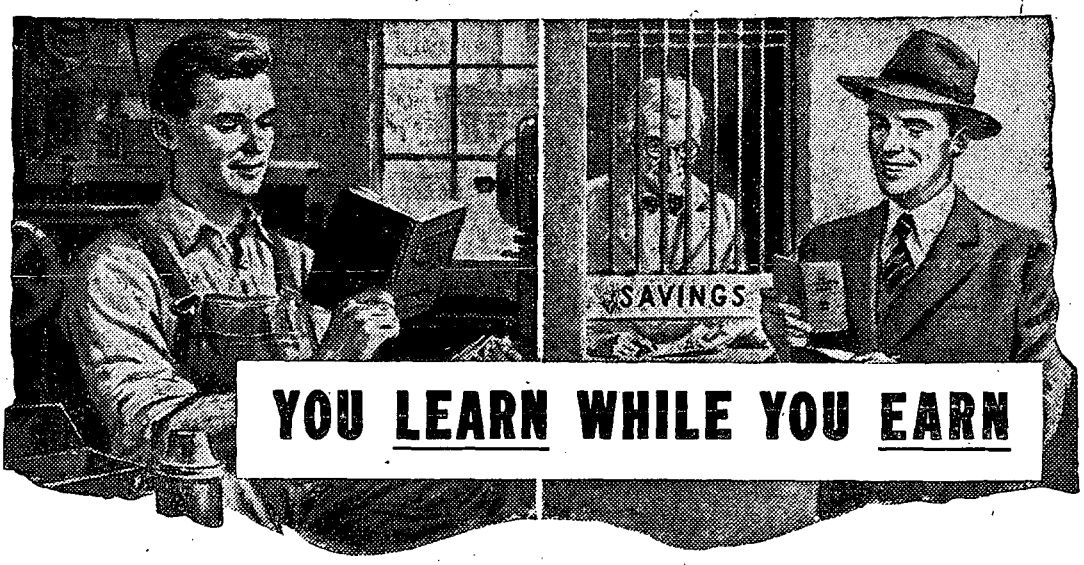

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TO WATCH

The tense silence of the moment could have been cut with a knife

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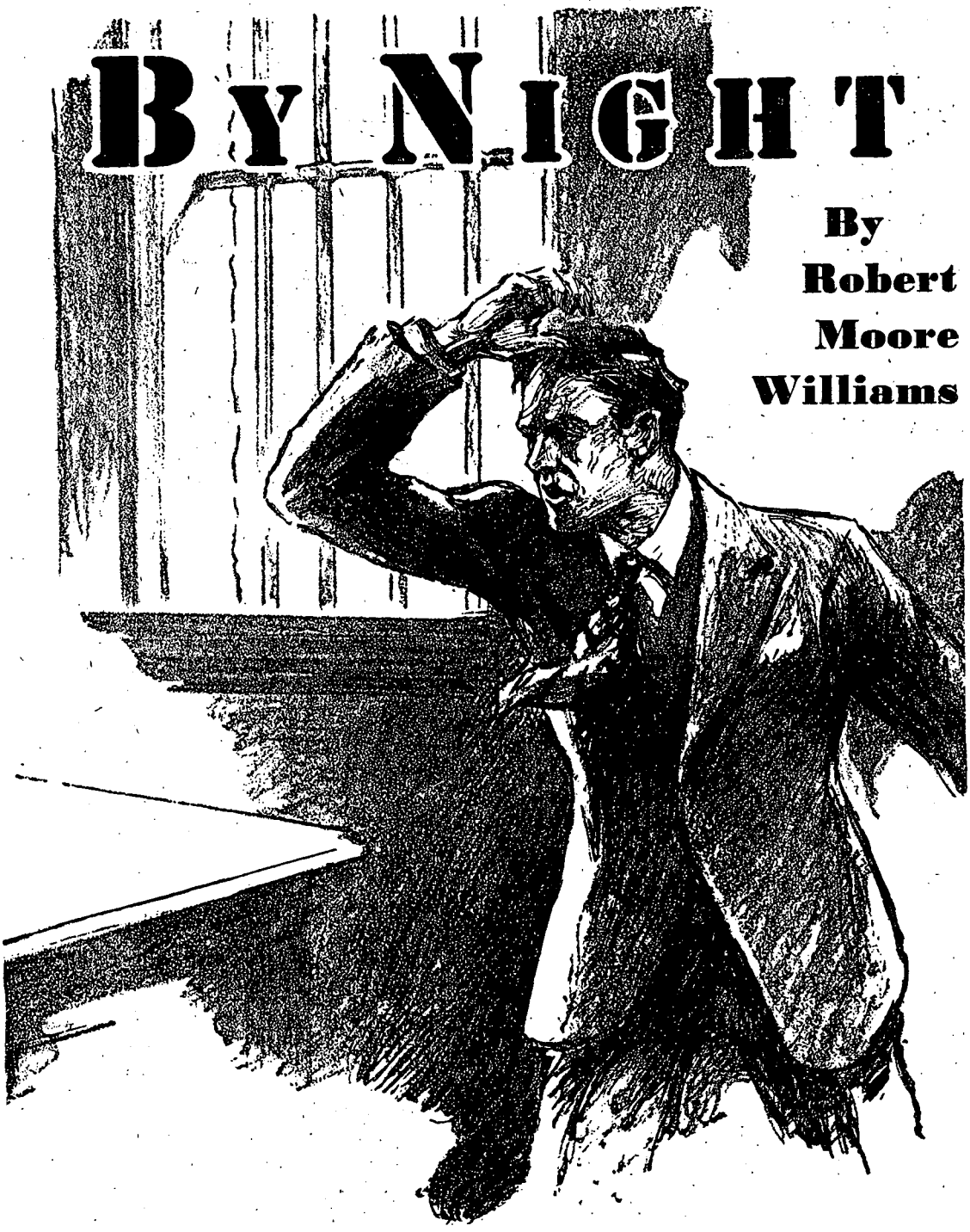
By Night

By Robert Moore Williams



Out of the night came an unbelieveable man with a crystal; and out of the same darkness came Death . . .

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"FOR CRIPE'S sake, lady, look out!" Don Reed shouted in horror. "He's going to shoot you!"

The girl, clad in a yellow linen dress that revealed shapely legs and hips, was half a block ahead of Don Reed. She was walking in the same direction he was going and he had already noticed her. He had also seen the man sneaking up behind her but he had paid no particular attention to either of them until the man had suddenly pulled a gun out of his pocket and had taken hasty aim at the back of the girl in the yellow dress.

It was mid morning and there were only a few shoppers on the street. Cars were crawling by on the asphalt, the drivers exercising tender care for their tires. On the corner a newsboy who had made himself hoarse with joy was shouting, "Another Jap battleship sunk. Read all abhhoout it!"

All in all, it was a perfectly normal morning in Chicago, except that cold-blooded murder was about to be committed on one of the Loop's side streets.

Don Reed was half a block away, too far to do anything except shout. He yelled at the top of his lungs, *"Look out!"* His voice was loud enough even to drown out the newsboy.

Startled pedestrians turned to gape at him. The killer jerked up the gun. The girl in the yellow dress seemed to hear him. She ducked.

Boom!

The sharp spiteful crack of the pistol echoed through the city streets.

The girl in the yellow dress kept on ducking. She turned half way around and Reed caught one glimpse of her face. She ducked out of sight.

One second she was on the sidewalk, an extremely frightened girl trying to dodge the bullet of an assassin. The next second she was gone.

The killer stood without moving a muscle. If some super-magician had turned him into a stone statue, the statue would have shown no more ability to move than did the man with the gun. He seemed to be frozen to the spot.

Then, as the girl had done, he vanished.

One instant a girl in a yellow dress was standing on the sidewalk and a man with a smoking gun in his hand was standing behind her. The next instant both the girl and the killer had vanished.

DON REED was running toward them when they went out of seeing. Abruptly he stopped. Without realizing he was doing it, he put his back against the nearest solid wall and stood there, gazing from slitted eyes at what was happening on the street.

The cars on the asphalt were veering to a halt, their wide-eyed drivers staring at the sidewalk. Pedestrians were standing without moving. In front of Reed a fat woman suddenly squawked, took three short steps, and abruptly sat down. She began to scream at the top of her voice. A man was leaning against a lamp post vigorously blowing his nose. He would blow his nose, put his handkerchief in his pocket, then jerk the handkerchief out and blow his nose again. A woman with two children aged about six and nine years was walking rapidly away. "You get right away from here, Johnny and Mary," she was saying. "You get right away from here."

A cop came running up. "What's going on here?" he vigorously demanded. "I heard a gun go off. Who got shot?"

The newsboy at the corner had seen everything. "It was two ghosts," he whispered. "One ghost took a shot at another ghost and they both vanished

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into thin air."

The cop glared at him.

"Into thin air," the boy repeated. "I was lookin' right at 'em. Before I could bat my eyes, they were gone."

"You get to hell back to selling newspapers!" the cop said. He turned to the fat woman sitting on the sidewalk. "What happened, Madam?" he said.

She shook her head and continued screaming.

The cop walked over to the man leaning against the lamp post. "What the hell is going on around here?" he demanded.

The man vigorously blew his nose. "I'm going home," he said firmly. "When I get there I'm going to lie down and rest. I feel faint." Turning away from the officer, he walked down the street. The farther he walked, the faster he went. By the time he reached the corner he was running.

The baffled officer walked over to Reed.

DON REED was as hard-boiled a newspaperman as had ever covered the police run. He had started his newspaper career working for a news bureau, learning the trade the hard way, and he was now one of the two star reporters on the Chicago *Globe*. He was tall and wiry, and while a grin came easily to his face, he usually talked like something that had walked straight out of *The Front Page*. He believed little that he saw with his own eyes, nothing that he heard, and nothing that he read in the papers unless he had written it himself, in which case he knew how big a percentage of truth it contained. He had not moved from the wall.

"Do you believe in ghosts?" he said in answer to the cop's question.

"Do I—" The officer choked and began to get red in the face.

"I thought you didn't," Reed sighed. "You don't look like a man who believed in ghosts."

"What's ghosts got to do with that shot I heard?" the patrolman demanded.

"Did you hear a shot?" Reed inquired.

"I certainly did."

"You did? Ah, well, I thought I did too, but it is very easy to be mistaken in matters like this," Reed answered. "Now, officer, if you will excuse me, I have work to do."

"Hey, what about that shot?"

"It must have been a back-fire," the reported threw back over his shoulder. On the sidewalk near the spot where the killer had stood a small object was lying. Reed picked it up, glanced at it, swiftly thrust it into his pocket and continued on his way.

It was an empty pistol cartridge. The murderer had been using an automatic. When he had fired the gun, the empty cartridge case had been ejected.

Reed wanted two things, one of them immediately. He entered the nearest bar. "Rye," he said to the bartender. "A shot of rye, straight."

He downed the liquor with a gulp. It warmed his stomach, took away a little of the cold feeling of tension that had come over him. He wasn't scared. A reporter develops a sang-froid carelessness that enables him to view sudden death with detachment. But Reed was terribly startled.

He had seen a man shoot at a girl.

This could happen. Men usually didn't shoot women but it had been done. There was nothing new in it.

He had seen the girl vanish.

This couldn't happen.

But it had happened, right before his eyes! Reed's first wild thought was that he had been tricked by some kind of an illusion. He had once seen an elephant

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vanish, before the eyes of a startled and thrilled audience, at the wave of a magician's wand. But that had happened on the stage. The girl had vanished on the street.

There remained the possibility that he had been the victim of an hallucination. In that case, the fat woman, the newsboy, and the man with the yen for blowing his nose, had suddenly been afflicted with the same hallucination, which was illogical.

If illusion and hallucination were ruled out, only one possibility was left: that the girl and the man who had tried to kill her had actually vanished. She hadn't ducked into a store, she hadn't dodged across the street, she hadn't run around the block. He had been looking right at her and she had ducked from sight in the split fraction of a second.

Reed fretfully ordered another rye. "Do you believe in ghosts?" he asked the bartender.

The bartender was a large man with a placid face. He was not startled at the question but he did seem to think it called for mature consideration. "Well," he began, "there is some that do, and some that don't. As for me, I can't say whether I do or whether I don't."

"Thank you," said Reed, leaving the saloon.

A drink had been the first thing he had wanted, a drink and a chance to think. There still remained the second thing.

He thought, when the girl in the yellow dress had turned around, that he had recognized her. He thought she was Nita Ayer.

The second thing he wanted to do was to go see Nita.

THERE were two star reporters on staff of the *Globe*. Don Reed was one. Nita Ayer was the second.

He found her in her cubbyhole off the newsroom. As he entered she looked up at him and smiled.

"Hello, Don," she said. "What's new today."

She was wearing a yellow dress.

Reed sat down on the corner of her desk. "Did anyone ever tell you that you are beautiful?" he said.

A smile danced in the depths of her dark eyes. "Frequently," she gaily answered. "Men often stop me on the street just to tell me I'm beautiful, artists want to paint me, and photographers try to take candid camera shots of me. I also endorse things. 'Nita Ayer, world famous beauty and newspaper woman, smokes this brand of cigarettes. Nita Ayer eats this brand of breakfast food. Nita Ayer wears the famous Kant-Rip swim suit.' Of course, Don, I've been told I'm beautiful. Hundreds of times." She paused and looked impishly at him. "But I'm always glad to hear it again."

Reed grinned at her. "When are you going to marry me?" he said.

She looked startled. "Don!" she gasped, performing a rapid calculation on her fingers. "This is Thursday. You don't ever propose to me on Thursdays. You propose to me regularly on Saturday nights and Monday mornings—"

"Because I have money on Saturday night and I want you to help me spend it. On Monday morning I have a hangover and I want you to hold my head," Reed gravely explained.

"Go away!" she said, in mock rage. "You've broken my girlish heart. Here I thought you loved me for myself alone and now I find it's only because you want me to help spend your filthy money or to hold your tousled head. Get thee from me, villian. I have work to do."

She turned back to her battered type-

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writer and resumed work on the story she was writing. She used the hunt and peck system in operating the typewriter. Reed watched her in silence. They gray moonstone in the bracelet she wore on her left arm winked at him as she operated the typewriter. He read the story she was writing.

"Six months you have been working on this newspaper and you still do not know how to spell 'negotiations'," he observed.

"Oh, dear!" she said.

He told her how to spell the word and she x'ed out the error and wrote it in correctly.

"Where did you live before you came here to work?" he questioned quietly.

She glanced quickly up at him, then down again, a quick measuring look. "Is that a question for a quiz program? I came from New York."

"Where did you live in New York?" Reed continued.

"In Brooklyn," she quickly answered.

"Brooklyn is not in New York," Reed corrected.

"Isn't it?—I mean, of course it isn't. I usually say I lived in New York because most people out here think Brooklyn is a part of New York." She lit a cigarette, looked keenly at him through the smoke.

"You don't talk like an inhabitant of Brooklyn," Reed observed.

"Do they talk in a special way?" she asked.

REED sighed inwardly. In spite of the fact that he had been almost daily in the company of this girl ever since she had turned up and had promptly been given a job on the *Globe*, he did not know her background. She had told him she had come from New York and that had been enough for him until now. All he knew about her was what his eyes hold him, that she was beautiful, that she had a remarkable talent for gathering news, that she was quick-witted and very intelligent. When she had come to work, he, and every unattached male on the staff, had promptly fallen in love with her. It been a delicious, delightful game. Now it was something else. When he tried to think of what else it might be, he had to fight the cold chills that passed up and down his spine.

"Do you believe in ghosts?" he said irrelevantly.

For a second a mask dropped over her face. Her gaze, fixed on him, was hard and mercilessly measuring in its intensity. Then she laughed.

"Of course!" she said, snubbing her half-smoked cigarette. "I believe in ghosts and fairies and werewolves and vampires. Except the green ones. I don't believe in green vampires. They're too utterly ridiculous. A vampire just has to be gray. Don't you think so?"

The glint of a smile was in her eyes and there was gay nonsense in her laughter.

"Don't laugh!" the reporter said harshly. "I'm talking seriously now. Do you believe in ghosts?"

"Why, Don!" Surprise was in her voice. "What on earth is the matter with you? Have you gone wacky on me, or something?"

"I think I have," Reed answered. "But tell me this: How long have you been in the office?"

"Possibly thirty minutes," she answered. "Don! What's this all about?"

"I'm practicing for a bout with the Quiz Kids," Reed said. He reached into his pocket, took out the empty cartridge case and laid it on the desk in front of her.

"Do you know what that is?" he challenged.

She glanced from the reporter to the

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piece of brass. A puzzled frown wrinkled the smooth skin of her forehead. "It goes in a gun, doesn't it?" she said. "I don't know much about guns but I was in a shooting gallery once and the things that came out of the guns looked like this, except they were smaller. Is it—is it—do they call them shells? Or cartridges? Which is it?" She glanced lightly up at Reed.

"When placed in a gun and fired at a human, the prosecuting attorney usually labels them exhibit B, the cartridge from the murder weapon!" the reporter answered. "What I want to know is, was this cartridge fired at you within the past thirty minutes?"

"At me!" she squealed in fright. "Did somebody try to kill me?" Then her face changed. She looked suspiciously at the reporter. "What's the gag, Don?" she said. "Don't keep me waiting. I'm dying of suspense."

THERE was ice in Don Reed's eyes, and something more than ice, a trace of panicky fear that he was fighting to keep under control. But when he spoke his voice was calm and suave; it gave no hint of the emotional storm within his mind. "Nita," he said, "the stage lost a great actress when you decided to become a newspaper woman. You might have been a very great actress, one of the best."

"Thank you, Don," she said. And now, for the first time, a trace of panic showed in the tones of her voice.

"Nita," Reed said slowly. "I'm your friend. You know that, don't you?"

"Yes, Don." She had recovered her composure.

"I love you, Nita," the reporter said simply.

"I—I'm afraid I know that too," she said hastily. Again her composure slipped.

"I would do anything I could for you," Reed continued. "You know that too, don't you?"

"Y—yes."

Reed's eyes drilled into her. "Then why are you lying to me?" he snapped.

"I?" she gasped. "I'm lying—"

"Quit stalling!" Reed said harshly. "You're in trouble and I know it and I want to help you, if I can."

He knew, as he watched her reaction, that he had been right in saying she was a great actress. Her face showed surprise and bewilderment and a lack of understanding, but there was no hint that she knew what he was talking about.

"Stalling!" she whispered, bewilderment in her voice. "Don, I can't even begin—"

"Quit it!" he snapped.

"But Don—"

"Look at the collar of your dress!" Reed rasped. "There's a groove in your dress collar where the slug that came out of this cartridge missed you by the skin of your teeth. If you aren't the girl in the yellow dress whom I saw vanish, then how did you get that bullet hole in your collar?"

The minute he had entered the room, Reed had seen the groove left by the bullet. It was at the side of her neck and was located in such a position that she could not see it except by pulling the collar out and even then she would need a mirror to see the mark. Obviously she did not know it was there and Reed had had no intention of calling it to her attention except as a last resort.

He knew she was stalling. He knew she was lying, pretending, acting. Beyond the shadow of a doubt he knew that Nita Ayer was the girl in the yellow dress who had almost been murdered and had vanished from sight like smoke before the wind.

Every time he thought of it, cold

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chills went up his spine. This girl who sat across the desk from him, Nita Ayer, was able to vanish, to disappear, to slide away into nothingness!

Who was Nita Ayer? *What* was she?

When he spoke, her face went dead white. She jerked her head around and down, trying to see the mark on her dress. When she could not see the groove that way, she snatched at the collar, pulled it out and around. Her fingers touched the spot where the frayed, broken threads marked the passage of the bullet.

REED waited for her to react. What would she say now? What would she *do?* She could not deny the presence of the bullet mark on her dress. He watched her like a hawk.

She looked up. She began to laugh. She laughed until tears ran down her cheeks.

"Oh, Don," she choked, between gales of laughter, "just because there is a groove in my dress, you think somebody took a shot at me! You're wonderful! All that build-up so you could propose to me in a new way! This is marvelous! You are so ingenuous in thinking up new ways to propose to me that I have half a mind to accept you."

Thunderstruck, the reporter stared at her. Was she stalling? Was she acting? "How did that hole get in your dress?" he demanded.

"I don't know," she confessed.

"You don't know?" he gasped.

"No. But I think I know. After I dressed this morning, I remembered there was a dress in the back of my closet that I wanted to leave out for the cleaner. I poked around in the closet after it and I must have caught myself on a nail. At least—" She bubbled over with laughter. "—at least I remember my collar catching on something, but I didn't think about it again —until now! Oh, Don, this is wonderful!"

Reed stared uneasily at her. The explanation she had given him sounded plausible. Suppose she was telling the truth? She *might* be. If she could really vanish when she wanted to, she was obviously something other than the girl she pretended to be and she would not be likely to admit so strange an accomplishment. In that case, her denial proved nothing and her explanation of the origin of the hole in her dress collar proved only that she was quick-witted, which he already knew.

The reporter tried to continue his questioning. He was answered with gales of laughter.

"All right," he said at last. "Maybe I'm wrong. Maybe I'm crazy. If it wasn't for this"—he picked up the empty cartridge case—"I would be willing to admit I'm crazy. But this proves I saw a girl in a yellow dress almost get killed, and— What do you want?"

The last was spoken to a copy boy who had hastily entered the room. The lad flung a sheet of yellow paper on the desk in front of Nita Ayer.

"Big human interest story," he said. "Just came in over the wire. All about a naked man who was found in a plowed field. A lot of dead chickens mixed up in it somewhere. The boss says for Miss Ayer to get right on it and work it up."

The boy dashed out of the room again.

"A naked man found in a plowed field!" Reed gasped. "What the devil is this anyhow? Here, let me see that story!" He reached across the desk for the sheet of yellow paper.

Nita Ayer was already reading the story. All the color was going swiftly out of her cheeks as she read. Her eyes

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were widening with horror and growing fear.

"Oh, Don!" she gasped, looking up. "Oh, Don! It's happened!"

Pushing the sheet of paper ahead of her, she slumped down on the top of the desk in a faint.

CHAPTER II

The Man from Nowhere

DON REED spent a frantic few minutes determining that Nita had only fainted. He dashed to the water cooler, got a cup of water, and spilled most of it trying to get her to take a drink. Fortunately more competent hands than his appeared on the scene, hands that knew what to do when a girl fainted, and Nita Ayer was promptly restored to consciousness.

She was much annoyed with herself for having fainted.

"Are you all right?" Reed asked anxiously.

"Of course, Don," she answered smiling at him. "There is, really, no need for you to look at me so frantically. A girl had a right to faint now and then."

"Not over this, she doesn't," Reed answered. He jerked his thumb toward the news story, which he had been hastily reading.

FARMER FINDS NUDE MAN IN FIELD

John McCloy, who lives on a farm about two miles north of here, found an unclothed youth asleep in a plowed field yesterday morning. When awakened, the youth, who appears to be about nineteen years old, spoke in a strange language that no one in this vicinity understands. He was unable to give an account of himself, to tell where he had come from, or to tell why he had been sleeping in the field. He seemed totally unfamiliar with the most common objects of the farm and he appeared to be greatly frightened by the live-stock. The sheriff, who was called to the scene by McCloy, removed the youth to the county jail, though no charges have been brought against him. The sheriff admits that he is baffled by the many unusual features of the case.

McCloy also reported that the same morning he found about half of his flock of chickens dead. The birds had been stabbed through the heart by some needle-like instrument. McCloy was unable to advance any reason for the destruction of the chickens or to suggest the means used in killing them.

The story had been filed from a small town in Wisconsin.

"Oh, that," Nita Ayer shrugged. "I didn't faint because of that."

"No?" said Reed.

"Of course not. Don," she said appealingly, "are you going to start asking those funny questions all over again?"

"Are you going up in Wisconsin to cover this story?" the reporter asked.

"Certainly," she said decisively. "Didn't you hear what the copy boy said?"

"Okay," the reporter answered. "I'm going with you."

"Don!" she quickly protested. "Really now! I was the one who was sent on the story, not you."

"That's all I wanted to know," Don Reed answered firmly. "Whether you like it or not, I'm going with you."

She didn't like it, she didn't like it a little. She did everything she gracefully could do in order to keep him from accompanying her. He was adamant.

"But why do you want to go, Don?" she questioned. "After all, it's not so big a story that I can't handle it alone. Why do you want to go with me?"

"Shall we say it is because I enjoy your company?" He grinned at her. The grin was all on the surface. Inside he was as cold as ice. Before he left he went to his own desk and got the .32 caliber automatic pistol that he kept there. The gun had been bought for him by the *Globe*, as a result of a series

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of articles he had once written revealing intimate details of the life of a certain gangster, now deceased. The management of the *Globe,* taking heed of the threats the gangster was uttering, had thought he might need the gun to protect himself. He had never carried it, until today. He carefully inspected the mechanism to make certain it was in proper working order, filled the slide magazine with cartridges, and slipped the pistol in his pocket. Then he entered the lair of the managing editor and bluntly announced that he was accompanying Nita Ayer. There was an argument, the editor loudly shouting that he had a newspaper to get out and how in the hell was he going to do it if two of his best reporters went chasing off on a feature story?

"Fill it up with boiler plate!" the reporter said. "I'm going with Nita." That was that. A newspaper does not fire a star newsman for being an individual.

THEY made the trip in Reed's car Nita, riding beside him, was thoughtful and silent.

"Don," she said at last. "What was back of those wild questions you were asking me?"

"That's what I'm trying to find out," he answered.

"Do you really think I was the girl whom you saw vanish?"

"What do you think?" he asked.

"Oh, don't be so evasive!"

Reed did not answer. He kept his eyes on the road. The girl seemed lost in thought.

"Don't you think," she said at last, "if somebody tried to kill me and I vanished, that I might not be a rather dangerous person?"

There was an impish glint in her eyes as she asked the question.

Reed felt the hairs rise on the back of his neck. Was she threatening him? If she could vanish at will, she certainly had strange powers. He shook his head. "You're too beautiful to be dangerous,' he said.

If she was teasing him, it was a game that two could play. If she would not answer the questions he asked, he would not answer the questions she asked. He was not absolutely positive she was the girl he had seen vanish, but he had grim suspicions.

They arrived in Rothmere, the town in which the story had originated, and found it a sleepy little country town, with few interests beyond the price of eggs, cheese, and crops. Reed wanted to go immediately to the jail and interview the strange youth who was being held there. Nita demurred.

"First, let's go talk to this farmer, McCloy, and see what he knows."

Reed agreed. It was as good a place to start as any.

McCloy lived in a small white house surrounded by neat, well-kept farm buildings. Behind the house was a plowed field of about ten acres.

There were a million farm homes that looked like this in the United States, Reed thought as he went up to knock on the door of the house. Some of them maybe looked more prosperous than this one; some of them didn't. The door opened to his knock. A gray-haired stoop-shouldered man with large gnarled hands and wrinkled, leathery cheeks stood there.

"Mr. McCloy?" Reed said. He introduced himself, then introduced Nita.

"You reporters?" McCloy asked. "Come in. Come in." He seemed flattered to think that a newspaper would send reporters all the way from Chicago to talk to him. He led them into a small sitting room and introduced them to a motherly woman who was Mrs. McCloy.

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"Sit down and make yourself at home," McCloy said. He seated himself in a cane-bottomed rocking chair. Leaning against the wall within easy reach of his hand was a repeating shotgun. "What can I do for you?"

"We're doing a story about the nude youth you found the other morning," Reed answered. "We would like to hear what you can tell us about him."

"Oh," McCloy said, in a low tone of voice. He looked questioningly at his wife. "You want to know about *him.*" He sat in thoughtful silence for a moment. He glanced at Nita Ayer and then quickly away, his gaze coming back to the girl again and again. Something about her seemed to fascinate him.

"How did you find him?" Reed prompted.

McCLOY looked at his wife to see if she thought he ought to answer this question. She nodded with perceptible hesitancy.

"I was going out to the barn," the farmer said. "It was maybe a quarter of four in the morning; sun wasn't up yet. First thing I noticed was that the cattle were all huddled up in a corner of the barn lot like they were scared."

"Had you heard anything during the night?" Reed questioned.

"Nope. Except that the dog barked a lot along toward morning. I didn't pay any attention to him, thought maybe a shoat had got out of the pen and he was barkin' at it."

"What about this young man?" Reed asked.

"He was right out in the middle of the plowed field back of the house," McCloy answered uneasily. "I walked out to him. First, I thought he was dead, but then I touched him, and he woke up."

"What did he say?" Reed questioned.

"I don't know what he said. He spoke all right but I couldn't understand what he was saying."

"What did you do with him?"

"I brought him in the house. We hunted up some clothes for him and my wife fixed up some breakfast in the kitchen for him."

The farmer's voice went into silence. "I can't even begin to understand that young man," Mrs. McCloy spoke. She look at Reed. "He didn't know how to eat."

"What do you mean?" the reporter questioned.

"I fixed him up a nice breakfast of ham and scrambled eggs. He ate them with his fingers."

"With his fingers?" the reporter gasped.

"He acted like he didn't know how to use a knife and fork," Mrs. McCloy said firmly. "I honestly believe he had never seen a knife and fork before in all his life."

Reed started to protest that this was impossible but caught the words before they were uttered. How did he know what was possible and what wasn't? "Was there anything else about him?" he asked.

The farmer hesitated. He had something else on his mind but he didn't much want to talk about it. The reporter prodded him.

"There's one thing I can't understand at all," he said at last.

"What is that?" Reed questioned.

"I found him in the middle of a plowed field," McCloy answered slowly. "The ground was soft. After I had brought him in the house I went back to the field and followed his tracks to see where he had come from. His footprints were plain enough. The danged thing is, they went along for thirty or forty yards *and then they disappeared!*"

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HE LOOKED at the reporter as if he expected this statement to be challenged. Reed realized that a part of McCloy's hesitancy was due to the fact that he had told this story before and it *had* been challenged. Men had been laughing at McCloy's story and he had become sensitive about telling it.

There was silence in the room. Outside the house a watchdog barked.

At the sound, McCloy reached quickly for the shotgun leaning against the wall, picked it up, and stepped to the window.

Not until then did the reporter fully realize how badly scared this farmer was. He looked at Nita Ayer. She was biting her lips and her face was set in an emotionless mask. Skin crawled along Reed's back.

"What is it?" he asked.

McCloy didn't answer. He stared out of the window, the gun held ready. Reed could hear the big clock on the shelf ticking sluggishly. Somewhere in the distance a cow bawled. McCloy leaned the gun against the wall and sat back down.

"It wasn't anything," he said. "Old Shep has been barking the last couple of days like now and then he sees something he don't like."

"Have you seen anything?" Reed asked.

The farmer shook his head.

"What do you think the dog sees?" the reporter persisted.

"Golly, mister, I don't know," McCloy answered.

"How do you think this young man you found got in the middle of your field?" Reed asked, changing the subject.

"I don't know how to answer that either," the farmer answered. "But if you want to come and take a look for yourself, I'll show you where I found him and you can try to figure out for yourself how he got there."

Reed rose with alacrity. "Coming?" he said to Nita.

"I—I—I don't believe so," the girl faltered. "I think I'll stay here and talk to Mrs. McCloy."

Her face was tense and colorless. Reed looked keenly at her. "Are you scared about something?" he demanded.

"N—no," Nita said quickly. "I just thought I would stay here and talk to Mrs. McCloy so I could get her angle for the story."

"All right," Reed said. He followed the farmer out of the house. McCloy, with a glance at his wife, left the shotgun behind, and Reed, in a flash of intuition, wondered if he was leaving the gun for her to use if she needed it. "Holy cats!" he wondered. "What's going on here?"

In the backyard a shaggy-coated shepherd watch dog joined them. The dog ran quickly to McCloy. When they went into the field back of the house it followed them with reluctance.

"I found him right here," the farmer said, pointing to a spot in the middle of the field. "His tracks went back to right there." He pointed to another spot about thirty-five yards away.

"Holy hell!" Reed gasped. "Did he drop from the sky or something?"

There was no other obvious solution. The youth had appeared in the middle of a plowed field. The soft soil would certainly retain his footprints. But his footprints did not go near the edge of the field.

"That's what some of these wise guys around here said when I tried to tell them the truth," McCloy answered sullenly. "You don't have to believe me if you don't want to. I'm telling you what I saw and what I found. You can take it or leave it!"

"No offense," Reed said, quickly

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apologizing. "But can you suggest any explanation for the way his tracks disappeared?"

"I can't suggest anything," McCloy answered. "My wife and I have been worrying ourselves sick about it. No matter how you twist it or turn it, it don't make sense. At first I thought maybe he had dropped from an airplane, but he would have needed a parachute to do that, and no parachute has been found. All I can say is that he must have *landed* in the field, ran a few feet, then collapsed, but mister, if you ask me where he came from, I sure can't tell you!"

REED did not doubt that McCloy was telling the truth. There was an air of dogged honesty about the farmer that was completely convincing. Farmers usually weren't liars. But where had the mysterious youth come from? What was he doing here? Why had Nita Ayer been so frightened when she first read about him?

Cold chills were playing all over Reed's body.

"He was completely naked?" he asked.

"Well, almost," McCloy answered hesitantly.

"Then he did have on some clothing?" the reporter questioned.

"You couldn't exactly call it clothing," the farmer said. He looked keenly at Reed. "Mister," he said suddenly, "What do you know about that girl who came here with you?"

"Why, everything, nothing," Reed said dumfoundedly. "She works with me. What's she got to do with this?"

"I don't know that she's got anything to do with this!" McCloy answered. "But I do know she's wearing a damned funny bracelet and I know this young man I found was wearing the same kind of a bracelet. It was the only thing he had on in the way of clothing, a bracelet. That's one reason I haven't been too anxious to talk to you, mister, because that bracelet had the same kind of big gray jewel in it that the girl who came with you is wearing!"

Reed rocked back on his heels. The information stunned him. He remembered perfectly the bracelet Nita wore. Never, since he had known her, had he seen her without it.

"But—" he gasped. The sudden sharp bark of the watch dog interrupted him. He turned quickly around. The dog was running across the field away from them. As it ran it was snapping back over its shoulder as if it was trying to bite something that was closely pursuing it. Its tail was tucked between its legs and it was running as hard as it could.

Suddenly it yelped in pain. Its muscles suddenly seemed to be without strength. It floundered along the ground, twisted, turned a somersault, tried to crawl along. It howled, its muzzle lifted to the sky. The howl died into sudden silence.

By the time Reed and McCloy reached it, the dog was dead. A tiny spot of blood marred its coat. Reed spread the fur aside. There was a small pinprick in the dog's side.

"Stabbed through the heart!" McCloy gasped. "Something stabbed it through the heart, just like something killed my chickens!"

The farmer's eyes were roving over the plowed field. He seemed to be looking for something and not seeing it. Reed made a hasty survey of the scene. If there was anything in the field, he couldn't see it.

And yet the dog had acted as if it had been chased by some invisible being, something that it could see or smell, but which a human could not see!

Reed looked everywhere. Nothing

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moved in the plowed field. McCloy, standing beside him, was also looking. They saw nothing. At their feet the dog lay dead.

CHAPTER III

Merthu

REED drove the car back to Rothmere. Beside him, Nita Ayer was pale and silent. He had not as yet mentioned the death of the dog. When they had returned from the field, McCloy had not said anything about it either, but as soon as he entered the house, the farmer had picked up the gun.

On the girl's left wrist, Reed could see the bracelet. It was set with a single large jewel that looked like a moonstone. Curved to shape the wrist, the bracelet was made of a single piece of some metal that looked like bronze. It was engraved with incredibly, delicate figures and Reed had the momentary impression that these figures might be some strange form of writing, but what the language was—if it was a language—he could not begin to guess. It looked a little like Hebrew script and it also seemed to resemble the cuneiform of the Babylonians as well as the hieroglyphics of the ancient Egyptians—three languages blended into one. He decided it was pure ornamentation.

"What did you find in the field?" Nita asked.

"A dead dog," Reed answered.

"A *what?*" she gasped.

He told her how the dog had died. As she listened she seemed to shrink into herself. Her face was calm and composed and no trace of tension showed on it but twice he noticed that she glanced furtively over her shoulder and out of the rear window of the car.

"That's odd," she said when he had finished. "What do you think killed the dog?"

"I don't know," he said. "I thought perhaps you might be able to offer a suggestion."

She looked startled. "I haven't the slightest idea," she said quickly, glancing at him. "What made you think I did?"

Reed shrugged. In his work he had interviewed many a person who was reluctant to talk but he had never found one who was so clever at evading questions as Nita Ayer.

Or was he misjudging her? Was she entirely innocent? When he thought she knew more than she was telling, was he completely mistaken?

He did not know. But he did sense that he was on the trail of a terrible mystery, he suspected it was so terrible that the people who knew anything about it were most reluctant to talk. He had seen a girl vanish, he had seen a man vanish, he had seen a dog run from something that he could not see, and he had seen the dog die. He pressed his arm against his pocket. There was little comfort in the feel of the pistol nestled there. What good would a gun have been against the thing that had killed the dog?

WHEN they arrived in Rothmere, Reed said, "Well, the next thing on the schedule is to hunt up the jail and interview the fellow who was found in the field."

"Why don't you interview him?" Nita said.

"You mean by myself?"

"Yes," Nita said quickly. "While you're seeing him, I'll talk to the people around town and get their angle on the story."

"Don't you want to see him?" the reporter questioned. "He's the most important part of this business."

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"There's no need for both of us seeing him," she suggested.

Reed hesitantly agreed. The suggestion she had made was in line with accepted newspaper practice. When two reporters are assigned to the same story, each covers a different angle, but Reed had the suspicion that Nita, for some reason she was not revealing, did not want to interview the strange youth. There was nothing he could do about it however. Dropping Nita in front of the only hotel the town afforded, they made a date to meet there in an hour, and Reed went on to the jail.

Reed did not know what he was expecting to find at the jail but ever since he had heard McCloy's story, he had been extremely curious about the youth who had miraculously appeared in the farmer's field.

The sheriff was a tall, raw-boned individual named Clanning. "Another reporter?" he said, when Reed had produced his credentials. "Sure, you can see him."

"Are there other reporters on the story already?" Reed asked.

"Three others here right now," the sheriff answered. He held up his hand for silence, jerked a thumb toward a closed door, and grinned. "Listen," he said.

From the room adjoining the sheriff's office came the sound of angry voices. One voice, an angry, bull-bellow, was raised above all the rest.

"Idiots!" the voice was shouting. "Stupidities! It is no sense that reporters have at all!"

THERE was a moment of silence, then another, quieter voice said, "It isn't that we don't have any sense, Professor. We run into so many fakers that we don't believe anybody. In your case, now, we aren't saying we don't believe you. All we are asking you to do is produce the goods. You claim to know where Merthu came from. All right. Prove it."

An angry growl came from beyond the door.

"Who's in there?" Reed asked curiously.

The sheriff chuckled. "The reporters are in there. They are interviewing Professor Harker."

"It sounds like they're giving him the needle," Reed said, grinning. "Who is he?"

"I do not know," the sheriff answered. "He is some blow-hard who turned up here this morning and said he knew where Merthu came from."

"Ah. And who is Merthu?"

"I forgot you did not know. He is the boy that McCloy found in his field."

"I see," Reed said. "How did you learn his name? I thought he could not speak any known language."

"Nor can he. He points to himself and says 'Merthu'. That is why we think his name is Merthu. But come with me. I will take you to his cell."

"Incidentally," Reed said, as he followed the sheriff back into the small jail. "Why have you kept him locked up?"

"I have not kept him locked up," the sheriff replied. "He is keeping himself locked up, by refusing to come out of his cell."

"He won't come out!" the reporter said. "That's odd. Why won't he?"

"I do not know that either," the sheriff said, shaking his head. "I think he is afraid to come out. Ah. Here he is. You can see for yourself."

The sheriff unlocked the door and Reed entered the small cell. Crouched like some frightened animal on the lower bunk of the double-decker bed was Merthu. Apparently someone had given him clothing, for he was wearing

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a khaki shirt and a pair of wrinkled trousers. He did not move a muscle when the reporter entered the cell but his eyes were fixed on Reed's face with unwavering intensity. Again the reporter had the impression that Merthu looked like an animal that, suspecting the presence of the hunter, is too frightened to move and can only crouch and wait for the death it fears is coming.

Reed smiled. It was an easy smile, the kind that invites confidence. "Hello," he said.

Merthu did not move. His eyes were fixed on Reed's face in a look in which fear and pathetic longing were mingled.

"You don't need to be afraid of me," Reed said. "I'm not going to hurt you."

He had no hope that the youth would understand the words but the tone in which they were spoken might carry meaning. It seemed to work. A little of the fear went out of Merthu's eyes.

"Se?" he said. *"Du quetchen se?"* His voice was soft and liquid.

"Sorry, I can't understand you, old man," Reed said. "And what I would give to be able to understand you!"

If he could only understand the language spoken by this frightened youth! The catch was, he couldn't. Apparently no one in this vicinity could understand the language. All secrets that Merthu might possess were locked in his own mind.*

Reed did not doubt that Merthu did possess secrets. Outwardly he looked much like an ordinary human boy about nineteen or twenty years old. A dozen characteristics betrayed the difference. The color of his skin was a golden tan, almost a bronze, his features were finer, more delicately moulded, than those of the average human, and there was a *strangeness* about him, an eerie weirdness that would not go into words, that was quite unlike the average man.

And yet Merthu had to be human. What else could he be?

UNABLE to talk to Merthu, Reed was forced to get all his information about the youth by just looking at him. There was one thing in particular that he wanted to see—the bracelet. It was easily visible. By signs the reporter indicated that he wanted to look at it and Merthu reluctantly extended his arm.

A glance was enough to tell Reed what he wanted to know. *The bracelet was exactly the same as the ornament Nita wore.* There was only one difference: the stone in Merthu's bracelet was broken. It was still held within its clasp but it was broken into two pieces. Somehow the fact that it was broken seemed to cause it to lose some of its life. The moonstone in Nita's bracelet had a peculiar shimmer almost as if it glowed with hidden, inner fires, but the

* The strange appearance of this bronze youth in some ways duplicates the mysterious case of Kasper Hauser, who appeared in Nuremberg, Germany, in May, 1828. The case attracted great attention at that time. Kasper Hauser, poorly dressed, barely able to walk, and unable to speak German or any other known language, turned up at one of the city gates. He was admitted, clothing and food were found for him, and as the fact became more and more clear that this boy was something of a mystery, great efforts were made to ascertain where he had come from. All attempts to trace his origin failed. Although every precaution was taken to protect him, two separate attempts were made on his life. Both failed. The third attempt, made while Kasper was walking in a park, did not fail. Stabbed in the side, he died. Why he was killed was never ascertained nor was his assassin apprehended, though every effort was made. The park in which he was walking when he received his death wound was covered with new-fallen snow at the time. When he ran from the park, crying that he had been stabbed, searchers went back over his trail trying to find the foot-prints of his murderer. No foot-prints, other than those made by the boy, were to be found. The case remains today a complete baffling mystery.—ED.

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stone in this bracelet was dull and lifeless.

"Where did you get that bracelet?" Reed demanded. "Who are you, anyhow? Where did you come from? Oh, damn it, why can't you talk?"

Merthu, startled by the tone, drew back into the corner. Putting the bracelet arm behind him, he stared at the reporter in doubtful fear.

"Sorry, old man," Reed apologized. "I didn't mean to snap at you. But damn it, I would give a fortune if you could only speak a language I could understand."

There was a link between Merthu and Nita Ayer! The bracelet proved it. But Nita, for reasons of her own, wouldn't talk, and Merthu couldn't. Reed had the solution to the mystery right before his eyes and couldn't solve it. If only Merthu could talk!

"Damn it, I'm going to get every language expert in the country down here!" the reporter exploded. "Somebody knows your lauguage. Somebody can understand you. I'm going to find out what is back of you or die trying."

"No need is there for that," a voice boomed from outside the cell. "I can understand the language spoken by this young man. I, the great Harker, will be glad to interpret for you!"

Startled, Reed looked up. The door of the cell was thrust open. A short, thick-set and apparently exceedingly strong man stood in the door. He was dressed neatly in a black suit and he had a square, flat face adorned by a pointed beard. From behind thick-lensed spectacles, black eyes snapped at everything within their range of vision.

"Who the devil are you?" Reed demanded.

The question seemed to astound the man. "You do not know the great Harker?" he demanded. "Permit me to introduce myself." Bowing from the waist, he extended a cord to the reporter.

Engraved on the card were the words:

JAMES RANDOLPH HARKER
Messenger from the hidden world.

"Oh," Reed said, struggling to repress a grin. "You're the fellow I heard talking to the reporters?"

"That I am!" Harker said. "Anyhow I was talking to them. I can only take your statement that you overheard me. Hah! Such damned fools as those reporters are I never thought existed in this world. Trying to explain the great truths to them was casting pearls before swine." He glared suspiciously at Reed. "You are not a reporter, are you?"

"Well, yes," Reed admitted.

"And are you also a fool?" Harker shouted.

"At times I feel like one," Reed answered. "But if you can talk to Merthu—"

"Of course I can talk to him!" Harker interrupted, glaring at the reporter. "What do you want to ask him?"

"Ask him where he came from."

"I don't need to ask him that," Harker said bluntly. "I already know where he came from—*the hidden world.*"

REED rocked back on his heels. The calm assurance of this man was bewildering and annoying. No wonder the reporters had given him the needle. Newsmen loved nothing better than to catch a quack.

"Where is the hidden world?" Reed questioned.

Harker smiled blandly. "That is a secret reserved for those initiates who have completed their instructions," he stated pompously. "Such secrets are

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never imparted to common men. Now—" he turned to Merthu "—since you desire it, I will demonstrate my ability to converse with this ah—runaway."

Reed choked off a desire to be sarcastic. After all, suppose this fellow could talk to Merthu!

Harker spoke a string of syllables that Reed did not understand. He looked at Merthu to see if the youth gave any evidence that he understood them.

Merthu had drawn as far away as he could get. He was still sitting on the lower deck of the bed. He had drawn himself into as tight a knot as possible and was back in the corner against the wall. He did not answer.

Harker spoke again.

Merthu gave no indication that he had even heard the words.

Reed lit a cigarette. He looked at Harker and grinned.

The grin drove Harker into a fury. "He understands me!" he shouted. "He just refuses to talk. He knows every word I have spoken."

"That's too bad," Reed said, in mock sympathy. "Now if you will excuse me, I think I have seen enough." Still grinning he left the cell. Harker glared furiously at him as he left.

REED drove back to the hotel to meet Nita. She wasn't at the hotel. He sat down to wait for her. An hour passed. Nita did not come.

Sheriff Clanning entered the lobby. He looked around, saw Reed, and came straight toward him.

"You're under arrest," the sheriff said.

"I—what?" the reporter gasped.

"You're under arrest," the sheriff repeated. "Get your hands up and don't try anything."

The dazed reporter found himself looking into the muzzle of a gun. He lifted his hands. Steel cuffs clicked on his wrists.

"You can't arrest me like this," he protested. "What are you charging me with? I haven't committed any crime."

"I am arresting you," the sheriff said grimly. "If you want to know the charge, it's accessory before the fact."

Reed stared in stupified amazement at the officer. "Accessory before *what* fact?" he demanded. "Have you gone crazy?"

The sheriff studied him. "I'm willing to admit that you may be innocent," he said. "But I'm not taking any chances. If you're innocent, you will have a chance to prove it. If you are interested in the charge, it's murder!"

Reed did not believe his ears. He was being charged with murder. It was impossible. It was mad!

"That's insane!" he blurted. "I haven't killed anybody. I can account for every minute of my time."

"I said the charge was murder," the sheriff answered. "I didn't say you had committed the murder. I said you were charged with being an accessory before the fact—"

"That means I helped somebody commit murder," Reed protested. "That's ridiculous and I can prove it. Who was killed?"

"Merthu," the sheriff answered.

"Merthu!" Reed gasped. "But he was all right when I left him. Who—" His eyes dug into the sheriff's face. "Who did kill him."

His thought was that Harker had killed the bronze youth and had succeeded in convincing the sheriff that Reed had helped him. Harker would have an obvious motive for bringing such a charge. Reed, as a reporter, would have a wealthy and powerful newspaper to help defend him. If the reporter were jointly charged with the

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crime, Harker would automatically get first-class legal assistance, free.

"Harker was in my presence when the crime was committed," the sheriff said. "He didn't kill Merthu. Merthu was killed by the young woman you brought down here with you, by *Nita Ayer!*"

Reed was too dumbfounded to attempt to protest as the sheriff led him away. Two thoughts were burning in his mind.

Merthu was dead.

Nita Ayer was charged with his murder.

CHAPTER IV

Nita's Story

"HOW was Merthu killed?" Reed hotly demanded. They were in the sheriff's office at the jail. Reed had been searched and the pistol had been found on him. It did him little good to protest that he had a permit to carry the pistol in Chicago. Such a permit was no good in Wisconsin. The sheriff and two grim-faced deputies were present.

"He was stabbed through the heart with a long needle," the sheriff answered.

"With a needle—" He stopped, appalled. He had seen a dog die, suddenly, of a stab through the heart. McCloy had said his chickens had died the same way. Now Merthu—

"How do you know that Nita Ayer killed him?" Reed demanded. "Did you see her do it?"

"No," the sheriff reluctantly said. "She came to the jail as soon as you left. It is my personal opinion"—he looked meaningly at Reed—"that she waited until you were gone before she came here. At least one of my men—" he nodded toward one of the deputies—"noticed her waiting around the corner. She seemed to be watching the entrance of the jail and as soon as you left, she came hurrying in and wanted to talk to Merthu. I granted her request. I had no choice except to grant it. Almost as soon as she entered his cell, we heard a scream. We went to him. We found Merthu dying and this girl was trying to escape."

In the face of such damning evidence, there was little that Reed could do. And —worst of all—Nita had tricked *him*. He knew now why she had suggested that he see Merthu while she talked to the townspeople. She wanted to get away from him so she could see Merthu alone. She entered the jail as soon as he had left, she had been seen waiting around the corner.

One conclusion was obvious. There *was* some connection between Nita and Merthu. Equally obvious was the fact that she knew a lot more than she was telling.

"I want to talk to her," Reed said.

Getting his request granted took some doing, including a long distance call to Chicago and a hot exchange of words between the sheriff and the Globe's managing editor. The sheriff reluctantly agreed. Reed was taken to her cell.

A second after he entered, she was in his arms. "I didn't do it, Don." she was sobbing. "I didn't. *I didn't!* You've got to believe me, Don. I didn't kill him."

"Who did kill him?" Reed said.

"The *hurthen* killed him," Nita Ayer sobbed. "It followed us from the farm. I was afraid it was following us, and when we got here, I tried to throw it off the trail. But somehow it managed to follow us. Don, I didn't kill him, I swear I didn't. The *hurthen* killed him."

"The *what?*" Reed gasped.

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"The *hurthen,*" Nita Ayer said. "You can't see it. The only way you can tell it's near is by feeling something like a cold wind blowing on you. The *hurthen* is invisible. But it's cold, like a snake. You can feel the coldness of it. That is the only way you can tell a *hurthen* is near—"

She broke off, stared at him with suddenly frightened eyes.

"What are you saying?" Reed whispered. "*A hurthen—cold winds*—Nita, what are you talking about?"

"*Don! Don! Don!*" Terror was alive in her eyes. "Forget I ever said that! Don, you *must* forget what I said! You must not believe me! Don, I am out of my head. I am insane!" Sobbing she threw herself on the lower deck of the bed and buried her head in the pillow.

REED sat down on the edge of the bed. Gently he took her hands in his. "I'm your friend, Nita," he said.

"Go away," she sobbed.

"I'm not going away," he said. "I'm staying right here until you tell me what this is all about."

"I can't tell you," she whispered. "I didn't kill Merthu."

"I know you didn't," he said gently. "Why did you go to him?"

"I wanted to talk to him. I wanted to find out why he was here. Even if the *hurthen* was following me, I did not think Merthu would be in danger. I thought he had protection. Tell me, Don!" she sat up and looked frantically at Reed. "Did you see Merthu before I did?"

"Yes," the reporter said.

"Did you notice whether or not he was wearing a bracelet—like the one I wear?"

"He was," Reed said. "I saw it."

"Was—was—" Again there was terror in her eyes. "Was the bracelet all right? I mean—was it broken, or damaged, or anything?"

"The stone was cracked," Reed answered. "What does that mean, Nita? I paid particular attention to the bracelet and the stone was broken. Was that important?"

"Oh, yes!" the girl gasped. "If the stone had not been broken, the *hurthen* would not have been able to touch him. I've been going frantic wondering about that. I was afraid Merthu's death meant *they* had discovered a way to overcome the power of the bracelet. I knew he was wearing a bracelet, but I did not know whether or not it was broken. Oh, Don, I'm glad you told me this."

Relief flooded through her voice. She had been on the verge of panic. But her words brought no relief to Don Reed.

"Nita," he demanded. "Will you please tell me what this is all about?"

Panic came back to her face as he spoke. She seemed to realize what she had been saying.

"Oh, Don, I didn't mean to tell you that!" she gasped.

"But I've got a right to know," he insisted. "Remember, I'm mixed up in this business too. What is a *hurthen?* Where did Merthu come from? Where did *you* come from? Where did you get your bracelet? What is the bracelet? Nita, you've got to talk."

"I won't talk," she wailed. "I can't."

"You've got to," Reed doggedly insisted.

"Don, I don't dare," she answered.

"But you must, Nita. Why don't you?"

Tears glistened in her eyes. "I didn't mean to tell you this, Don. I meant to go away, so you would never know. You would forget me, if I went away—"

"What are you talking about?" he interrupted.

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The tears were rolling down her cheeks now.

"I love you, Don. That's what I'm talking about."

"You—" The suddenness of the admission left Reed speechless. It seemed to him that ever since he had first met this girl he had been in love with her, but until now he had had no inkling that she also loved him. His heart skipped a beat, then raced. "Nita—" he whispered.

"I love you, Don," she repeated. She dabbled at the tears with a tiny crumpled handkerchief. "That's why I won't tell you who I am or what I am."

"But Nita!" he insisted. "That is all the more reason why you should tell me."

"No, it isn't," she repeated. "It's a perfect reason why I should not tell you."

"Why?" he demanded.

"Because the knowledge I have means death!" The words were forced from her lips. "If I tell you what I know, they will kill you, Don, just as they killed Merthu, to make certain he would never talk, just as they will kill me, if they can, just as they have tried to kill me so many times, and failed. D—Don, do you understand now why I won't talk?"

DAZEDLY Don Reed stared at her. She had given him a convincing reason for her silence. She loved him. She didn't want him to die. If she told him what she knew, he would be killed. That was what she thought.

"That may be," Reed said grimly. "But I'll take some killing, Nita. I've had a few hot shots after me before now and I'm still alive and kicking."

"You wouldn't have a chance against the Dark Ones, Don. No more chance than Merthu had, when the *hurthen* came and found him defenseless. Nor do they have to kill by sending a *hurthen* to stab their victims through the heart. They would be near you and you would never know it. Maybe all that would happen would be that your heart would suddenly stop beating. There would be no wound, no sign to indicate the cause of death. Anyone, even the best doctor in the country, would think you had died of heart failure. You would know what had killed you, but you would never be able to reveal your knowledge. You would die too quickly. Believe me, Don, I know what I am talking about. For your safety, I dare not talk."

She talked earnestly, in a soft, tense voice. Night was coming and shadows were creeping into the cell. The light had not been turned on.

"Do you think I'm a sissy, Nita?" Reed argued. "I'm not afraid."

"I know you aren't afraid," she answered. "That is another reason why I won't tell you what I know. If you were afraid, you might have a chance."

"Who are the Dark Ones?" Reed said doggedly.

But Nita had regained complete control of herself. She had spoken only under the compulsion of panic and fear. Now she had her emotions under control. She refused to answer another question.

"No, Don," was all she would say, accompanied by a firm shake of the head.

"But what are we going to do?" he protested. "Remember, you are charged with murder. Merthu was killed when you were with him. You will never be able to convince a jury that he was stabbed by some invisible creature that you call a *hurthen*. I hate to say it, Nita, but you're in a tough spot, and you are going to need all the help you can get."

"Don't worry about that," she an-

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swered. "I will never face a jury."

"But you won't have any choice, unless—" he hesitated, then blurted out the words, "—unless you are going to plead insanity, in which case the verdict will be an insane asylum. Nita, you've got to talk. You've got to tell me everything, so I can try to help you."

His protests were useless.

"TIME'S up," a voice spoke from outside of the cell. A deputy entered. Reed was taken to the office of the sheriff.

"Sit down, Reed," Sheriff Clanning said.

"Well?" Reed said, slumping into a chair. He was aware that the sheriff was staring fixedly at him.

"That was a strange story the young lady told you," the sheriff spoke at last.

"You listened?"

"Naturally," the sheriff nodded. "I had my secretary in the next cell taking notes in shorthand. What do you make of her story, Reed?"

"I'm damned if I know," the reporter blurted out. "She didn't kill Merthu. I'm convinced of that. There was some connection between them but I don't know what it was. I don't know who she really is or where she came from or anything about her, actually. But I do know that she is up against the toughest proposition that any human being ever faced."

"Yes," the sheriff gravely agreed. "Murder is a serious matter. Even if you are innocent, a murder charge is a serious thing."

"Hell, I'm not thinking about that murder charge," Reed snapped. "I'm thinking about the Dark Ones, whatever they are. That's what she is up against—the Dark Ones."

Unbidden into his mind came the mental picture of dark creatures moving furtively on earth. The thought was sinister. A cold wind suddenly seemed to blow on him. He leaped to his feet, looked wildly around the office.

"What is it?" the sheriff said, alarmed.

"I thought—I thought something cold touched me," Reed whispered. "But it was nothing."

Except for the normal furnishing of the place, the office was empty but Reed had the haunting feeling that he was being watched, that somewhere sinister forces were coldly calculating how much he knew.

He forced himself to sit back down. If there was a *hurthen* in the office, there was nothing he could do. The *hurthen,* Nita had said, was invisible. The only way you knew it was near you was by a feeling of cold!

As Reed sat down, the door of the office opened. A startled deputy entered. "Hey, sheriff!" he shouted. "She's gone!"

"What?" Clanning demanded. "What are you talking about? Who is gone?"

"The girl we're holding on a murder charge," the deputy said. "Nita Ayer. I just looked in her cell and she wasn't there."

"Escaped? Are you crazy?" the sheriff demanded. "How could she have escaped?"

"I—I don't know," the deputy answered. "All I know is that she is gone."

Clanning got energetically to his feet. He did not object when Reed followed him and the deputy back to the cell where Nita had been held prisoner.

The reporter watched the perturbed sheriff examine the door. It was still locked. The deputy produced a key and the three men entered. They made a thorough examination. The walls were of stone reinforced with steel. The windows were heavily barred. The lock had not been tampered with.

Nita Ayer was gone.

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The sheriff looked at Reed. "Did you have anything to do with this?" he demanded.

Reed shook his head. He did not trust himself to speak.

"You were the last person who was with her," the sheriff insisted.

"So what?" Reed questioned.

"Maybe you gave her a key to the lock," Clanning suggested. "Maybe as soon as you left, she opened the door, and slipped out the back way."

"Maybe I had a key to give her!" Reed snorted.

"I didn't think of that," Clanning said thoughtfully. "Well, we'll soon know how she escaped. She can't be far away. She hasn't had time to get far. I'll put in a call to block all roads. We'll pick her up all right."

"I'll give you odds of ten to one you don't pick her up!" Reed said.

"What do you mean by that?" Clanning demanded. "Of course we'll catch her. This is a small town. There are only three main roads leading out of it. She won't have a chance to escape. In a big city she might be hard to find, but here it will be easy."

Reed kept silent. Although he was technically still under arrest, he was allowed to return to the sheriff's office. There he listened while Clanning put out a general call for Nita Ayer.

An hour passed. Reed knew that all around the town of Rothmere the roads were blocked. Pick-up orders had gone out over the air. Within a fifty mile radius all cars were being stopped and their occupants investigated. Deputy sheriffs were scouring the town of Rothmere and the surrounding country.

They hadn't found Nita Ayer.

At midnight they were still searching. They weren't having any luck. The search was relentless and grim, but Nita Ayer could not have disappeared more effectively if she had walked off the face of the earth.

"Anyhow this proves she was guilty of killing Merthu," Clanning said. "If she wasn't guilty, why would she run away?"

It was a question Reed could not answer, even to his own satisfaction. Why had Nita run away? She had said she would never face a jury. Had she meant that she was going to escape? Also, how had she escaped? That was the confounding question. How had she escaped from a locked, barred cell?

CHAPTER V

The Search for Nita Ayer

THREE days later, Nita Ayer was still missing.

Don Reed had been released on bond. The fact that he had been released at all showed that the office of the prosecuting attorney felt it had a very slim case against him. Or no case at all. Reed knew his full release was inevitable. The prosecution simply did not have enough evidence to convict Nita Ayer of murdering Merthu, and they had no case at all against him. He moved into the local hotel.

The hunt for Nita Ayer was dying down. Clanning had started the hunt with a great deal of determination. The more time the sheriff had to think about it, the less vigorously he prosecuted the search. The sheriff had reasons for letting the hunt die down, good reasons.

The first reason was the *way* Nita Ayer had escaped. There were two alternatives, one, that she had opened the lock with a key. But there were only two keys. The sheriff had one and his deputy who served as jailor had the other. Therefore, if she had used a key to escape, she had either bribed the sheriff or his deputy. Even if this had not happened, the sheriff knew, if there

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The flame of it in his hand illumined his face

was much talk about it, a lot of people would believe that he or his deputy had accepted a bribe. Clanning had been elected to his office. If the voters got the idea he could be bribed, he would not be re-elected.

The second way that Nita Ayer could have escaped involved the supernatural. No one in a public office and in his right mind would under any circumstances admit the existence of the supernatural, for the obvious reason that if such an admission did not get him impeached, it would certainly be used against him in the next election.

The sheriff was caught in something a little worse than a dilemna. As soon as he had time to think about the matter, he took the one course open to him —he shut up tighter than any clam. The office of the prosecuting attorney, which had first sensed a sensational murder mystery with its consequent publicity, shut up with him. The sheriff and the prosecuting attorney examined the facts and found them not at all to their liking.

The facts were:

A naked youth had appeared in a plowed field under mysterious circumstances, a youth who could not talk English or any other known language.

This youth had been murdered while he was securely held in jail.

The girl who had at first been charged with his murder had vanished from a locked, barred cell.

There was no natural, easy explanation for any of these facts. The only way to explain them was by the supernatural.

The fourth day after Nita Ayer had escaped, the sheriff issued a guarded explanation to the effect that "Nita Ayer was possibly not guilty of murder, as he had first thought." Then he got busy chasing a gang of tire thieves.

The prosecuting attorney issued a statement that, "While this case is not closed, until new evidence is brought to light, no further action can be taken." The prosecuting attorney then went on a fishing trip.

Both of them fervently hoped that the public would speedily forget the whole thing. They wanted to forget it too. Both of them secretly knew that a supernatural mystery had been dumped in their laps. They wanted no part of it.

DON REED, still staying in the local hotel, received with no enthusiasm, the news that he was no longer charged with complicity in the murder of Merthu. He had seen the haste with which the case had been dropped and he clearly understood the actions of the sheriff and the prosecuting attorney. He had not written and had not attempted to write a single line of the real story for his own paper. A few other reporters, attracted by the sensational promise of the news, had come into town. After investigating the story, they had departed as swiftly as they came, without writing a word about it. Like the sheriff, they had good reasons for their actions.

If they wrote the stories, their papers would not publish them.

Newspapers have a reputation for veracity to maintain. If they published a story like this, their readers would either call them liars or laugh at the ingenuity of the reporters. Hence, no stories were written. The supernatural is sternly censored out of the newspapers or is buried among the opium dreams of the feature sections.

Don Reed, viewing the operation of this system of censorship which promptly clamped down to prevent the publication of news of a supernatural nature, was struck by a sudden

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thought: How many other supernatural events occur daily on earth and never get mentioned in the newspapers?

How many times have strangers been observed in fields, their presence reported only by farmers who doubt their own eyes? How many people have actually seen ghosts and been afraid to talk of their experience for fear of being laughed at?

The thought had shuddery implications. It was possible that every day on earth people saw astounding things happen!

In this particular case, Don Reed had seen too much to have any doubt that he had come into first-hand contact with what could only be called supernatural. He had all the facts the sheriff had. In addition, he knew he had seen Nita Ayer vanish. The girl in the yellow dress had been Nita.

She had escaped from the jail in the same way she had escaped from the man who had tried to kill her.

Also, he knew what Nita had told him. She had told him precious little, he thought bitterly. She had talked of the Dark Ones and of a *hurthen* and had refused to tell him anything more, in an effort to save his own life. She had said that knowledge was deadly. He knew, as he made the decision, that he was walking headlong into danger, but he also knew that he would never rest until he found Nita Ayer. Wherever she had gone, he would find her. He would solve this mystery.

The first problem was to find Nita. She was the key that would unlock all doors. If she could be found and convinced she ought to talk, she could explain about the Dark Ones, about Merthu, about the *hurthen*.

How to find her?

Don Reed returned to Chicago, reported back to his newspaper office, prepared to resume the old routine of work. As he came back to town he cherished the hope that he would find Nita at the office and things would go on as before. Possibly this was only a dream. Possibly Nita was back in her cubbyhole at the Globe, pounding out stories.

She wasn't there. She had not returned to her job. The managing editor irately wanted to know what had happened to her.

"I don't know," Don Reed said. "I just don't know. All I can say is that she skipped, but don't ask me why."

With that answer, the editor had to be content. He was annoyed at the loss of a valuable employee, but he was too busy a man to demand a full explanation. The other members of staff, less busy than the editor, did demand explanations. The reporter parried their questions. Answering their questions truthfully would only get him a nomination as a candidate for a nut-house.

REED prepared to begin the search for Nita. Fortunately his job as a reporter gave him both the time for investigation and an excuse for carrying it on. Nita had rented an apartment in an apartment hotel. Reed's first step was to go there. He planned to obtain a key from the manager and make an investigation of her personal effects. It was possible she might have left old letters, books, or something that would give him a clue about her. A frequent caller at the hotel to see Nita, Reed already knew the manager. He anticipated no difficulty in securing a key to her apartment.

"Glad to give you a key to her apartment, Reed," the manager said. "However, you understand I will have to go with you while you make your inspection."

"Of course," the reporter agreed. Nita was a tenant of the hotel and in

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her absence it was the manager's duty to protect her property left in the apartment. Obtaining a pass key, the manager conducted Reed to the rooms Nita had occupied.

"What happened to Miss Ayer?" the manager asked.

"Nobody knows," Reed answered. "She disappeared and we're trying to locate her. Has she, by any chance, been here recently?"

"I haven't seen her," the manager said. "Of course, I might not see her for days, but if she entered or left the building, the desk clerk would be almost certain to see her, and he hasn't. I happen to know because a missing tenant is always reported to me. Ah, here we are!"

Opening the door of the apartment, the manager stepped inside. Reed, following close behind, bumped into the man as the manager suddenly stopped moving. An exclamation of surprize burst from his lips. The reporter saw what had happened.

The room had been ransacked. It looked as if a cyclone had struck it. Contents of the dresser drawers had been brought to the living room and dumped in the middle of the floor. The drawers had been completely pulled out of the writing desk. The top had been torn off the desk, apparently in search of a suspected secret hiding place. The carpet had been pulled off the floor, the pictures taken from the wall and the brown-paper covering torn from their backs. In places the paper had been ripped from the wall, apparently in a search for something that might have been hidden behind the wall-paper. Books had been pulled from the shelves, the cushions of the sofa and chairs had been ripped open, flower pots had been broken and the dirt dumped out on the floor.

It was the most perfect example of systematic destruction that Reed had ever seen. Nothing that might have served as a hiding place had been overlooked. Even Nita's clothing had been taken from the hangers and pulled apart seam by seam.

The manager's face hardened. "Burglar's!" he gasped.

"Burglars, hell!" Reed said. He made a quick inspection of the rooms. In one spot, where the carpet had been pulled up, the wooden floor was smudged and blackened. Bits of crumbled ashes remained in this place. A small fire had been lit here, something had been burned, and then the ashes had been stamped on to remove the possibility that the experts of the police department might make something out of them. "They were burglars all right," the reporter said grimly. "But they weren't looking for money or jewels. They were looking for something they could burn, something like several sheets of paper." He pointed toward the smudged spot on the floor.

"Why should they do that?" the manager asked.

"To keep me, or somebody else, from finding it!" the reporter said bitterly. "There was information here, information that might have been of value to anyone who was looking for Nita Ayer. Somebody suspected it might be here. Somebody found it, and destroyed it. Damn me for a fool for not coming here sooner. When do you think this happened?"

"I—I have no idea," the manager faltered. "It must have been done at night but whether it was done last night or several nights ago, I have no way of knowing. This—this an outrage. I—I am going to call the police."

"Go ahead and call them," Reed said. "If you find anything, call me at the Globe. But if you or the police or anybody else finds anything, I am going

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to be greatly surprised." He turned and stalked from the room. Inwardly he was cursing himself for not having come first of all to Nita's apartment. But he hadn't thought of it soon enough and somebody had beaten him to the apartment.

Somebody—or *something?*

A cold wind passed over his body as the thought occurred to him that *something* might have searched Nita's apartment. What if the burglars had been supernatural?

Horror walked into his mind, grinned, and passed on. He shrugged the thought aside. "Supernatural or natural," he said grimly. "I'm going to find what is back of this. And I'm going to find Nita!"

The next day he took the second step in the search for Nita Ayer.

CHAPTER VI

The Messenger from the Hidden World

THE first edition of the *Globe* that hit the streets the next morning carried on its back pages a picture of Nita Ayer. Under it was the caption: NEWSPAPER WOMAN MISSING

The text that accompanied the picture carried an appeal to anyone who possessed any information as to the whereabouts of Nita Ayer to get in touch with Don Reed, care of the *Globe.*

If Reed had had his way the picture would have appeared on the front page and would have been twice as large. The editors over-ruled his demand, arguing that since there was no evidence of foul play, the paper, to protect itself, could not carry a bigger story. The editors were not too anxious to run to the story at all but they had grudgingly permitted it to appear on the back pages. The editors thought they were being reasonable about the matter. They were concerned about Nita, but, after all, she might have simply decided not to come back, in which case a wild search for her might blow up in the face of the editors, to their chagrin. Don Reed saw their reluctance to handle the story as another illustration of the operation of an unconscious censorship.

There was one section of the paper the editors could not easily control—the paid ads appearing in the agony column. The reporter grimly paid his money to the ad department. This ad appeared in the personal notices.

Missing—Nita Ayer. Where did she come from? Where is she hiding? Who is she? Reward. Don Reed, care of the Globe.

He ordered the ad run for a week. Somewhere was somebody who knew something about Nita Ayer. The ad, the photograph, and the story should bring to light information about her. Meanwhile, all he could do was wait for something to happen.

He didn't have to wait long. That afternoon a messenger boy came into the office with a message for him. He snatched the letter from the fingers of the boy, tore open the envelope.

"Don—" the letter ran. "Don't be a silly fool. I'm perfectly safe, I'm happy, but I'm not coming back. I have good reasons for my actions, reasons which concern only me. You stay out of this."

The letter was signed "Nita."

The first person to answer his ad had been Nita herself! Nita was alive! If he could only believe what she said, she was safe. She was obviously in Chicago. The speed with which the ad had been answered and the fact that a messenger boy had been used to deliver the answer proved that she was in Chicago.

"Where did you get this message?"

"At my office, sir," the boy promptly answered. "The manager gave me a lot of stuff to deliver and this was in it."

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"What's the telephone number of your office?"

Reed dialed the messenger service, got the manager on the phone. In his mind was the hope that Nita had left a trail behind her. If he could trace this message! If he could find where she was hiding!

"Sorry," the manager said. "I have a record of a letter given to us to transmit to you. We keep a record of all such transactions. In this case the name and the address of the sender were not filled in."

"Is there any way you can trace the person who gave it to you?"

"None whatsoever! If the sender does not choose to leave his name and address, there is nothing we can do. In this case the letter was turned in at our office, the fee was paid. Our responsibility in the matter ends with delivery. Sorry, I can't help you, but that's the way it is."

REED flung the phone back on its hook, tossed the boy a tip, and swore. The first clue that might have led to Nita had run straight into a stone wall.

The reason it had run into a stone wall was obvious.

Nita did not want to be found!

The reason she did not want to be found was also obvious.

She was protecting him! She had told him to forget her, that she was dangerous to him. She loved him! Therefore she was staying away from him.

More than ever he sensed the tremendous mystery back of this girl. Beautiful, enigmatic Nita Ayer! Who was she? Where had she come from? What secret was she hiding?

Cold winds passed over the reporter's body. Suddenly he remembered something Nita had told him. The *hurthen*—the only way you knew a *hurthen* was near was by a feeling of cold.

He was cold, cold! There was a coldness pressing against his spine, there was a coldness on his legs. He crouched at his desk, not moving, not daring to move. Was there an invisible *something* near him? Had a *hurthen* followed him from Wisconsin? He remembered the dog that had tried to run and running had died. He remembered Merthu crouched back in the corner of his cell, trying to make himself as small as possible. He remembered the terrible fear on the face of the bronze youth. Something of that same fear was walking through Reed's mind.

He looked slowly around. The newspaper office, the battered copy desk, the city editor with his green eye-shade, re-write men banging out copy, boys hurrying to the copy desk for proofs, all this was perfectly normal. From the street outside the building came the vague tooting of auto horns, the bang of street cars, the shouts of newsboys. In the distance there was the old, familiar rattle and bang of the elevated trains. The sights and the sounds were those of a normal afternoon in Chicago. If he walked to the window and looked down, he would see the streets crowded with people.

A reporter, coming by, stopped suddenly and looked at Reed.

"What makes, Don?" he demanded. "You look like you're seeing a ghost."

Reed forced a grin to his face. "I got a little touch of indigestion," he said.

The reporter accepted the explanation. "Take a bromo," he advised. "And change your brand of whiskey."

"Thanks," Reed said feebly. He watched the reporter go up and enter into an argument with the city editor. The sight was so perfectly normal that it shocked him. Everybody on the staff

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argued with the city editor. It was custom, tradition. Yet among these familiar sights and scenes, Don Reed sat very still, aware only of a feeling of cold.

Was the cold feeling going away? Or was it growing stronger? He waited. In him was the fear that death was very near. What had Nita said? You might seem to die of heart failure! Or a needle might plunge through your heart! A needle had been plunged through Merthu's heart.

He waited. Slowly, an inch at a time, the cold feeling went away. It was gone! Gone! From head to foot, he was covered with sweat. He sagged back into his chair.

Even if death had been very near, even if death might come again, he knew what he was going to do. He went down to the advertising department, inserted a notice in the personal column.

"Nita: I'm playing out my hand in this game. Don."

The notice made the last edition of the paper. Somewhere in Chicago within a couple of hours Nita would buy a copy of the paper. She would know that he was not quitting, that he was not giving up. He had been dealt a hand in a strange game of hide and seek with death. Nothing short of death would keep him from playing out that hand!

When he returned to the newsroom, Don found an envelope lying on his desk. It too, had been delivered by the messenger service. He opened it. It read:

Dear Mr. Reed:—

The picture of Nita Ayer in the Globe of this date has been called to my attention. If you will call at my quarters at 6163 S. Argoyle Avenue at nine o'clock tonight, it is possible that I may be able to give you some of the information you are seeking.

You may recall our previous meeting.

Sincerely yours,
JAMES RANDOLPH HARKER.

The great Harker! The man who called himself the messenger from the hidden world! Somewhere, somehow, Harker was mixed up in this mad enigma!

REED'S first stop was at the shop of a shifty-eyed pawnbroker on South State Street. There, for a price, he obtained a gun to replace the one the Wisconsin sheriff had taken from him. It was a bull-dog revolver with a short barrel, one the ugliest-looking weapons ever fabricated by the human race. And at close quarters, one of the most efficient. He slipped it, and an extra supply of cartridges into his pocket. He wondered what good a gun would be against—well, against a *hurthen*. A shudder passed over him at the thought. A gun would probably be worse than useless but at any rate, it made him feel better.

He went home, to shave and change clothes. Home to him, as it had been to Nita, as it is to thousands of others in Chicago, was an efficiency apartment in a large hotel on the near North Side. Stuffed in his mail box at the hotel desk was a telephone slip to call his office.

"There's a package here for you," he was told over the phone.

"What kind of a package?"

"Just a package," the telephone operator at the *Globe* told him. "It's about three inches square and it's wrapped in tissue paper. Addressed to you in a girl's handwriting. I thought it might be important so I called to tell you about it."

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"I'll be down to pick it up a little later," Reed said. A package for him! He had made no purchase, had ordered nothing from any store. Later, when he returned to his office and opened the package, a note fell out. The note was in Nita's handwriting.

"Dear Don:—If you are determined to play out your hand in this game there is nothing left for me to do except try to help you, but again I want to warn you that you are risking your life. Indeed, you have already risked it. Beyond question, your newspaper search for me has already been noticed, and in consequence your death, in all probability, has been decreed. Don—" (There was a sudden, pathetic appeal in the note.) *"—I tried to warn you! Why wouldn't you listen?*

"Go to some small hotel, register under an assumed name, and stay out of sight until you hear from me. Keep in contact with your office by telephone. I will call your office and leave a message for you. Until you hear from me, hide!

"Above all things, wear the object I am enclosing in this box.

Frantically,
Nita."

In the box, wrapped in tissue paper, was Nita's strange moonstone bracelet! She had given him her bracelet! With a shock, he remembered her words. The bracelet was a means of protection against the *hurthen*. Merthu's bracelet had been broken. Nita had said the *hurthen* would not have been able to kill Merthu if the bracelet had not been broken.

In an effort to protect Don, she had given him her bracelet!

"The little fool!" the reporter raged. "She shouldn't have done this. She shouldn't have—" Seeing the startled eyes of the telephone operator, who had given him the box, on him, he hastily broke off. Already the whisper was going round the office that Reed had taken a dive off the deep end. There was no point in adding fresh fuel to the flame. Thanking the girl for holding the box for him, he left the building.

He had a problem to solve. Nita had told him to go into hiding. She had warned him. The problem was whether or not he was going to do what she had ordered.

"Does she think I'm a sissie?" he said angrily. "Does she think I'll run and hide when somebody says 'Boo!' "

He knew what he was going to do. There had never been any doubt in his mind about what he would do. Hailing a cab, he climbed into it.

He intended to keep his appointment with Harker.

IN THE back seat of the cab, he examined the bracelet. The moonstones glistened with a milky light. The metal felt slightly warm to the touch, as though it was warmed by hidden fires. While the cab jolted south through Chicago, he examined it minutely, trying to trace the fine lines graved in the metal, the lines that might be writing in some unknown language, and might be mere ornamentation. He could not decide whether they were ornamentation or writing. They might be either.

"That's the trouble with this damned business!" he said bitterly. "Everything can always be something else. Nothing is ever clear, nothing is ever certain."

The bracelet might be a charm. In that case, the name for it would be magic. It might be a cunningly-contrived scientific device, in which case the name for it would be science. It might be—a bracelet, made to delight the heart of a woman who loved

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jewelry. There was no way to know what it was. The only sure fact he had was that Nita believed in it. She had worn it constantly. To which could be added the fact that she loved him enough to try to protect him at the risk of her own life. Muscles jutted into knots at the corners of his jaws at the thought.

Re-wrapping the bracelet in its protecting tissue paper, he slipped it into his pocket. He could not wear it on his wrist. Men did not wear jewelry. Wearing the bracelet would make him a marked man.

The address which Harker had given him turned out to be a large, rambling, stone house located on a big lawn. It was surrounded by an iron fence. Both were relics of the days when this section of Chicago had been suburban, the builders here aspiring to create an exclusive residential section. Once fine homes had been built along these quiet streets, but the city had flowed over and around them, engulfing them in its resistless tide. When this house was new, you could be certain that the person who lived in it was a wealthy, respected citizen. Today anyone might live here.

Reed pushed the gate open, went up the brick walk. There was a light burning over the front door. He rang the bell. Almost instantly the door opened. A Negro stood there. He was a giant of a man. At least six feet six inches tall, and broad in proportion, he looked as if he could lick Joe Louis with one hand tied behind him. With the exception of a turban wrapped around his head, he was clad in the conventional black and white of a butler. Reed blinked at him. He had expected Harker to open the door. He had not expected to find a butler.

"You wish to see the master," the Negro said. His voice was so deep it seemed to issue from some cavernous well.

"I came to see a man named Harker," the reporter answered. "I don't know about this 'master' angle."

"Mr. Harker is the master," the butler replied. "Are you Mr. Reed?"

"Yes."

"Enter, please. You are expected."

Bowing, the butler stepped aside. Reed entered. He heard the door close behind him. A split second later he felt the Negro touch him. The touch was as light as a feather but Reed sensed what was happening. His hands leaped toward the pockets of his coat. He spun around.

In one hand the butler was holding his gun. In the other hand he held the tissue-wrapped bracelet. As Reed had entered, the Negro had picked his pockets. The most expert pickpocket in Chicago could not have done a better job of it.

"Give me t h a t," the reporter snapped.

The Negro shook his head. "No guns allowed," he said. "As for this—" He was unwrapping the paper from the bracelet. "—when I determine what it is, perhaps it will be returned to you. Ah—" Moonstones glowing gently, the bracelet lay in his huge palm. The Negro looked at it. He seemed to freeze. A tremor passed over his body. From slitted eyes, he glanced up at Reed. The reporter lunged for the bracelet. He found himself looking into the muzzle of his own gun.

"Keep back!" the b u t l e r said. "K—keep back."

REED backed away. It was all he could do. The butler stared at him, gun held unwaveringly, and the reporter knew he was trying to make up his mind whether or not to shoot. The bracelet had scared the Negro,

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scared him badly. He had recognized it instantly. When he looked at it, terror had walked across his face. Terror was still on his face, blind, mad terror.

With an effort of will, he seemed to regain control of himself.

"T—the m—master will see y—you," he said. With the gun, he gestured toward a door. "I—in there."

Covered by the gun, Reed opened the door. He stepped into a large comfortably-furnished room. Shelves filled with books extended from floor to ceiling. On the floor was an Oriental rug, from the richness of the colors and the design, a masterpiece worth a small fortune. Soft lights cast a mellow glow over the room.

Against the farther wall was a large, antique desk. Harker was sitting behind this desk. He looked up when Reed entered the room, looked over the reporter's shoulder at the butler, his face a thundercloud.

"Samadu! You fool! What is the meaning of this? Did I not tell you I was expecting this gentleman?"

"Master," the giant whispered pleadingly. "He had a gun."

"What of it? Did you expect him not to have a gun? You fool—"

"Please, master," the giant begged. "He also had—*this!*"

He extended the hand that held the bracelet. Harker saw the bracelet for the first time.

A lightning change came over his face. All anger left it. His cheeks, puffed to shout, deflated, sagged in upon themselves. The pupils of his eyes widened. He stared at the bracelet. Terror grooved his face.

There was silence in the room. Far away, as though from another world, Reed heard the honk of an automobile horn. The sound was not repeated. Harker swallowed. Reed could see the motion of his throat. He seemed to be making an effort to regain control of himself.

He spoke. His voice was a whisper. "You may go, Samadu," he said.

Silently the Negro laid the gun and the bracelet on the desk in easy reach of Harker. In silence he left the room. Harker opened a drawer of his desk. Using a ruler, he pushed the gun and the bracelet off the top of the desk. They fell into the drawer. Harker closed it. He looked up at Reed. In his eyes was more malevolence than the reporter had ever seen in the eyes of any man. Hate, vicious, bitter, burning hate, looked out of Harker's eyes.

"Well!" he said. "A son of destiny!"

"What?" Reed said.

"You fooled me," Harker said. "You pulled the wool over my eyes very neatly. I thought, when I met you in that Wisconsin jail, that you were just another stupid reporter. I thought, when you advertised for information about Nita Ayer, that you were a stupid fool sticking your nose into something that did not concern you. It was very cleverly done. I did not begin to suspect your true identity."

THE reporter kept his face under control. He did not know whether he was dealing with a madman, or whether, beneath Harker's gibberish, there was hidden a terrifying vein of truth.

"May I sit down?" he said. He had remained standing.

"Certainly," Harker shrugged.

Reed pulled up a chair. He sat down. Quite calmly he lit a cigarette. "And now?" he said.

"A cool one you are," Harker said, surveying him. Suddenly there was irritation in his voice. "Why are they always so cool and calm, these fools who call themselves the sons of des-

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tiny? Why does nothing, even the threat of death, ever move them?" He pounded on his desk.

Reed shrugged. "I came here seeking information about Nita Ayer," he said.

Harker stared at him in an amazement he did not attempt to hide. "You are attempting to keep up that fiction?" he gasped. "Now that I know who you are, you still pretend that your purpose in coming here was to seek information about her?"

"Why not?"

"Why not!" Harker gasped. "Why—why—why not!" He seemed at a loss for words. There was exasperation on his face. He looked at Reed, then looked away. "Do you think I am so stupid that I will believe any story you may tell me, after—after that bracelet was found in your possession? Do—do you think you can stick to the story that you are a reporter attempting to trail a missing employee? Do you think I am that stupid?"

Reed said nothing. There was confusion in his mind, roaring confusion. When he first met Harker he had been convinced that the man was a fake, that in all probability he was the leader of some secret cult that found its followers among the lunatic fringe of the human race. Harker, with great ostentation, had said he was a messenger from the hidden world. This statement alone had branded him as a faker. His pompous manner had confirmed the impression. Yet Harker had answered his ad. Harker had either known something about Nita Ayer or had hoped to find out something. And certainly Harker had recognized Nita's bracelet, not, apparently, as belonging to her but as belonging to some group that he called the sons of destiny. Because the bracelet had been found in Reed's possession, Harker had leaped to the conclusion that the reporter belonged to this group.

What if Harker was not a faker? What if he was what he claimed to be, a messenger from the hidden world? What was the hidden world? Who were the sons of destiny?

There was confusion in Reed's mind. But through that confusion a thread of truth was beginning to run. Facts that had fitted nowhere began to slip into place. A kind of picture was beginning to emerge. The whole picture was foggy as yet. It was blurred and out of focus. But here and there spots of light were beginning to emerge. Vaguely he sensed rather than saw a kind of dim relationship between facts that until now had appeared to be completely isolated.

Harker knew something. That was beginning to be obvious. Harker thought that Reed was a member of a group that he called the sons of death. The obvious thing to do was to stall and try to find out what Harker knew.

Stalling was risking his life and he knew it. He shrugged the thought aside. In his mind was the grim suspicion that his life was already forfeited anyhow.

Reed grinned. "Exactly how stupid do you want me to think you?" he asked.

Harker stared at him in dumfounded amazement.

CHAPTER VII

The Blackness Beyond the Door

"YOU do not seem to realize where you are," Harker said slowly.

"Oh, I know where I am all right," Reed said easily. "My office knows where I am too and so does the police department. Naturally, I appreciated there might be some risk in coming

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here and made my plans accordingly. If I do not return within a reasonable time, I am afraid you will have to answer some embarrassing questions."

Reed was lying. He had informed no one of his plans. But Harker didn't know that. Any ideas of violence that the latter might hold would be tempered by the belief that Reed's whereabouts was known.

Harker said nothing. The baffled look on his face became more pronounced. There was silence in the room, complete silence, the utter absence of any sound. It suddenly struck Reed that the friendly sounds of the city night, the clang of street car bells, the honk of automobile horns, were no longer audible. Chicago seemed to have gone to sleep.

Harker shook his head. "I do not begin to understand it," he said, and Reed got the impression that his inability to understand was somehow making the man afraid. Harker reminded him of a man who suspects a trap but can't see the snare.

"What is so difficult to understand?" the reporter asked.

"The fact that you would put yourself in my power," Harker answered. He looked at Reed, a worried frown on his face. "You see, I am being frank," he said, spreading his hands. "That you, a son of destiny, should put yourself in my power when you *must* know what I am, is unbelievable. The only logical answer is that I am being tricked, that a trap is being set for me, and that somehow you are the bait of that trap."

"Ah!" said Reed. So his impression that Harker was afraid of a trap had been correct! But what kind of a trap was it that he feared?

"Why did you answer my ad if there was a chance you would be trapped?" the reporter asked.

"When I answered your advertisement, I thought you were a nosey reporter inquiring into something that did not concern you. It was my intention to fill you full of hot air and to further the conviction you had gained at our first meeting, namely, that I was a faker. Believe me, I did not suspect your true identity, or I would have handled the matter in an entirely different manner."

Grim, harsh tones crept into his voice. He looked at Reed and lights guttered in his eyes, lights of hate. There was no mistaking his meaning. A shiver passed over the reporter.

"I take it you mean I would have been rubbed out?" he said, keeping his voice calm.

"You take it correctly!" Harker said grimly. "Rubbed out is a mild expression for what would have happened to you!"

"What long teeth you have, grandmother," Reed said. "If I may ask it, why all this sudden tendency to homicide? Don't you like the sons of destiny, or do you just enjoy bumping people off?"

Harker looked at the reporter. There was a thoughtful look in his eyes. "What a stupid question!" he said slowly. A worried frown creased his forehead. "Or is it so stupid?" he spoke. "Is it possible—*could it be possible*—that you are not a son of destiny? No! It is not possible! You have the power bracelet of the sons and daughters of destiny. That means you are one of them. But—" A worried, fearful tone crept into his voice. "—could you have come into possession of the bracelet in some manner? Could you have found it or could it have been given to you—?"

FIST crashing on his desk, Harker leaped to his feet. "By the devil, it is possible!" he shouted. "The brace-

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let belongs to the girl! She is in love with you. She knows you are in danger. She gave you her bracelet, to protect you! You are not a son of destiny! You don't know a thing about—about us! For the last hour, you've been sitting there trying to pump information out of me—*out of me!*"

Harker screamed the words. The idea that anyone would try to get information out of him seemed to enrage him. He pounded on the desk. In his fury he knocked a heavy inkwell to the floor. Reed picked it up.

"You seem to have analyzed the situation very accurately," he said. "Try your analysis on this!"

With all his strength, he flung the inkwell in the other's face. Made of glass, the inkwell weighed two or three pounds. It hit with a solid *thud*. It was too heavy to break. Ink splashed in every direction. Harker reeled backward. He crashed against the wall, slid to the floor, made gasping sounds in his throat.

Reed jerked open the desk drawer, grabbed his gun and the bracelet. A glance told him that Harker was likely to be unconscious for several minutes, but there remained the possibility that Samadu, waiting in the entrance hall, had heard the crash. Gun ready, the reporter faced the door. He expected the Negro to put in an appearance any second. He waited. Samadu did not come. Either he had not heard the crash or he had strict orders not to interrupt Harker no matter what happened.

"I got to get out of here!" Reed thought. "I got to get out of here, fast."

There was danger in this room, deadly danger. He did not understand the nature of the danger, but he clearly sensed its existence. Harker was no faker. Harker, whoever he really was, possessed incredible powers. Reed knew he had been lucky to catch the man off-guard. When Harker recovered consciousness—the reporter shuddered. A cold sweat was popping out all over his body. He tip-toed to the door, listened.

No sound came from the hallway. If Samadu was there, he was keeping quiet. Reed's plan was simple. Jerk open the door, cover Samadu with the gun, force the Negro to open the front door and to march ahead of him out of the house. Once on the street, he could grab a cab, get to hell away from here. In seclusion, he could plan his next move. First of all he had to get out of this house, out of this room, if he wanted to continue living. Harker's threats had been too clear for him to doubt the man's intentions.

He took a deep breath, jerked open the door. He was poised to hurl himself through the opening. He looked outward, ready to leap—and caught himself. Terror gripped his heart.

Beyond the open door was—*blackness!* It was not the darkness that comes when the lights are turned off, not the darkness of a shuttered room at midnight, but an utter, complete *blackness* that gave back no sign of light. It was such a blackness as was on the void before the heavens were lifted up, before the earth was set in place, before the sun and the stars came. There was no glimmer of light in it. It was not just a hallway without lights. It was tangible blackness.

Fighting the panic in his heart, Reed stared at it. As he watched, little streamers seemed to detach themselves from the void of darkness, to come like exploratory fingers into the room. Like the tongue of a snake, they reached toward him. He slammed the door; ran to the window. Whatever was in that

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hallway, one thing was certain: escape through it was dangerous. That left the windows. He ripped aside the heavy drapes, unlocked the window, flung it up—and looked out into the same kind of blackness that had been in the hall!

BEYOND the window lay darkness. There was no glimmer of any kind of light. The street lights were not visible, nor was the sky. He could not see the street, the lawn, or the shrubbery on the lawn. There was only blackness and silence, a silence so great it hurt his ear drums. Suddenly he remembered how, a little while before, the familiar sounds of the city had seemed to fade away into the distance, to go into silence, how the clang of the street car bells had died down, how the honk of automobile horns had died into nothingness. Had this blackness come then? He could not hear a sound. And, exploratory fingers of darkness were coming through the open window. He slammed it shut.

There were other exits, another door, other windows. He needed only a few minutes to try them all. At the end he knew the horrible truth, beyond each door, beyond each window, was nothing but darkness. Grimly he struck a match, opened the hall door, tossed the match into the darkness. Its little flame was swallowed up, was instantly gone into nothingness.

Cold chills were shuddering through his body; even colder winds were screaming through his mind. He pulled a book from the shelf, tossed it through the open door, waited for the sound of it striking the floor to come back to his straining ears, like a man caught in a dark cave who finds a drop-off yawning beneath his feet and tosses a pebble outward so that the sound of the pebble will tell him how deep is the cavern ahead of him. No sound returned! Either the blackness deadened sound or there was no bottom to the pit that yawned outside the door. The reporter fought off panic. He closed the door. A sound behind him jerked his head around. Harker had made the sound. Harker had recovered consciousness. Harker was watching him.

"Why don't you run?" Harker jeered. "I won't stop you. Jerk the door open and run."

Reed licked his lips. The salt of the perspiration on his face was acid on his tongue. "No, thank you," he said. "I believe I'll stay right here. What—what is on the other side of that door?"

Harker pulled a handkerchief out of his breast pocket, wiped ink from his face. "Nothing," he said.

"N—nothing!"

"You heard me. Nothing! Not anything. The void. No matter, as you know matter, no space—nothing." Harker straightened his chair, sat down heavily in it. There was an ugly bruise on his forehead. In his eyes was black hatred. "How would you like to die?" he said, looking at Reed.

There was no mistaking the menace in Harker's voice. The reporter swallowed. "I don't know," he said. "What kind of deaths do you have handy?"

Harker looked startled. "May I be damned if you're not a cool one!" he said.

"Ice-water Reed is what they call me!" the reporter said. His hand was in his pocket on the gun. He was stalling for time, his mind racing desperately as it sought a solution for his problem. He could not escape. Beyond this room lay darkness. Harker somehow controlled that darkness. If he could force the man to lift the blackness—like a drowning man, he was grasping for straws and he knew it. Straws were the only things within his reach. It was grasp them or grasp

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nothing.

Harker grunted. "This is no time for stalling," he said. He snapped his fingers. "Look!"

"Look where?" Reed asked lightly. The words froze on his lips. Directly in front of his eyes something was hanging in the air. It was gray and indistinct but he could clearly make out the outlines—a thin, narrow streak of grayness, pointed like a spear, aimed straight at him.

"W—what is that?" Reed husked.

Harker laughed. "Did you ever see a *hurthen?*"

"N—no!"

"Well, you're seeing one now. Very useful creatures, the *hurthen.* They make excellent body-guards and first-class executioners." Harker chuckled. He seemed to be enjoying himself. "It has been here all the time, watching you, needing only my order to attack. I knew you could not see it until I made it visible but I wondered why you did not feel it. Hah! How would you like to have that needle-pointed spear driven straight through your heart?"

REED did not, could not, answer. Again that terrible feeling of cold was creeping over him. Somehow the gray creature radiated coldness. Or perhaps it drew heat from the surrounding air, with the result that anyone near it felt cold. Looking closely at it, he could barely see two tiny unwinking eyes and he knew that the creature somehow was alive. It possessed intelligence, a horrible intelligence. But more than anything else, it possessed malevolence, hate. It hated him. It hated all living things. It would like to destroy him. He could well imagine how one of these things, loose in a chicken house, would destroy the whole flock. It seemed to be yearning toward him, to be quivering with eagerness to get at him.

"Now that you can see it, how do you like it?" Harker said.

Reed tried to speak and choked.

"I see you do not like it any more than did Merthu," Harker observed. "Or any of the others who have had the misfortune to see it."

"This—this killed Merthu?" Reed whispered.

"Yes," Harker gloated. "I went there for the express purpose of killing him. The first *hurthen,* which was sent as soon as it was certain he had arrived, failed in its task. They are not, you conceive, too reliable when distant from their masters. They sometimes stray, and being bloodthirsty little beasts, will wander around attacking both men and animals. I think the first one was distracted from its mission by other prey although it is of course possible that some strength remained in Merthu's bracelet of power, thus thwarting the *hurthen.* I went personally to attend to the matter!" He chuckled. "And I almost succeeded in trapping the girl at the same time. Oh yes, that murder charge almost took care of Miss Ayer. It was too bad that she escaped."

"Yes," said Reed grimly. "It sure was too bad." The dryness in his voice did not reveal the hot tension in his mind. At last he knew that Nita had not killed Merthu. Harker had done that little job! Harker and the gray creature that hung in the air before him!

"Are you ready?" Harker said. Like a cat with a mouse, he was teasing the reporter. And he seemed to enjoy the torture.

"If you're ready," Reed said huskily. "I am. But I warn you—". The gun leaped from his pocket. "—if that gray monstrosity moves toward me, you're a dead man. It may be able to float in the air, but the question is, can

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it move faster than a bullet? No, the bullet won't be aimed at it. I doubt if a bullet would harm it. The slug will go through your guts, Harker. *Keep your hands in sight and don't move.*"

HARKER had started to rise. He hastily settled back in his chair when the muzzle of the gun covered him.

"You forgot I might have taken my gun from your desk while you were unconscious, didn't you?" Reed said. "Well, don't forget this: If you make a move I don't like, I'll put a bullet through you. If that thing," he gestured toward the *hurthen,* "moves a fraction of an inch, you'll get the same treatment. Put your hands on the top of the desk and keep them there."

Slowly Harker put his hands on the desk. The *hurthen* did not move. Reed was intently watching it out of the corners of his eyes. It hung motionless in the air, waiting the command of its master to go into action.

"I want to ask some questions," the reporter said. "Who are you?"

Harker did not answer.

"Speak up!" the reporter grated. "Or by all that's holy—" His fingers tightened around the gun, emphasizing his meaning.

"I scarcely think you will find it advisable to shoot," Harker spoke. "If you kill me, you will still find some slight difficulty in escaping from this room. To be alone here with my little friend," he nodded toward the motionless *hurthen,* "would not be exactly pleasant. No, Reed, you won't shoot me. You might as well put that gun down because you're not going to use it."

"I'm not?" the reporter said.

"No. I can think of more pleasant ways to commit suicide. This room is suspended in nothingness, Reed, and only I can release the nothingness. If you shoot me, you will stay here forever. Only, of course, my little friend will soon take care of you if I were gone."

"Will your little friend—" Reed reached into his pocket, "—be able to overcome this?"

He held Nita's bracelet up for Harker to see. The bracelet of power, Harker had called it. The reporter did not begin to know how to use it, but he knew, from the way Harker had spoken about it and from what Nita had told him, that somehow tremendous powers were leashed within that circlet of carved metal and moonstones. Harker looked startled when he saw it. His eyes darted toward the desk drawer, then came up to fix themselves on Reed's face. There was fear in them now.

Reed clamped the bracelet on his left wrist. He rose to his feet, quickly extended his arm toward the motionless *hurthen.* As the bracelet came toward it, the gray creature leaped away. It lunged against the wall of the room like a frightened bird that does not know where it is going but seeks only to escape. Recovering from striking the wall, it darted toward the ceiling, where, in a corner of the room, it hung quivering, as far away from the bracelet as it could get.

Reed chuckled. "Your little friend seems frightened," he observed.

Harker looked at him from bulging eyes. "W—what are you going to do?" he whispered.

"I'm going to take a walk," the reporter answered.

"A w—walk?"

"Yes. You surely know how to walk. You put one foot ahead of the other and pretty soon you find you have traveled from one place to another. Get up, Harker. I wouldn't think of

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taking a walk without the pleasure of your company."

"M—me?"

"Yes, you!" Reed snapped. "You will walk ahead of me. You will open the door and step into that blackness on the other side. Of course," the reporter shrugged, "if you should find such a step unpleasant to contemplate, and should cause the blackness to go away—"

He didn't finish but Harker understood his meaning. As long as the blackness waited outside the room, Reed knew he could not escape. Harker controlled that blackness. He controlled Harker. If he forced Harker to step through the door—

"I—I won't do it!" Harker gulped.

"If you don't," Reed said grimly, "I'll put a soft-nosed bullet through your guts. Then we'll stay here and watch each other die. You will die first, Harker. With you dead, I'll see whether the darkness remains. Which will it be, Harker: a walk, or a bullet?"

The ink from the inkwell had splashed all over Harker's face and had partly dried. It was dissolving now, as sweat popped out of the pores of his skin. Sweaty ink was running down his cheeks as he stared at Reed.

"I don't suppose I need to remind you that I mean what I say?" the reporter said.

"N—no," Harker said. He rose to his feet, walked around the desk and toward the door. The reporter, gun jammed in his back, followed him. What would happen when the door opened? Would the blackness that Harker said was nothing begin to creep into the room? If it did, Reed would know his bluff had failed.

Harker opened the door. Before him, an inky curtain of nothingness, the blackness stretched. He made a strange movement with his hands, spoke jumbled words deep in his throat. Like a veil that is torn aside, the blackness disappeared. The entrance hall with its dim lights gleaming, stood clearly revealed. The hall was empty.

"Out the front door," Reed said. "And remember: no breaks. I don't know who or what you are, Harker, but I know this much: if you make a break, I'll shoot you like I would a mad dog."

"W—where are you taking me?" Harker quavered.

"Wait and see," Reed answered. He knew exactly what he was going to do. Slipping the gun into his pocket, but keeping Harker covered, Reed forced the man to walk out to the street. He glanced back, once, at the rambling old house. To the casual eye, it looked like a perfectly ordinary old home that had gone to seed. But Reed knew that never again would he be able to regard it, or any other house, with a casual eye. Strange things happened in houses and strange things happened on earth. He whistled for a cab.

AN HOUR later the two men were in a room in a third rate hotel in the Chicago Loop. They had stopped in a drug store long enough for Reed to secure a roll of adhesive tape. Harker was sitting in a chair. His arms were taped together behind him and his legs were taped to the legs of the chair. He had, in spite of the tape, managed to recover some of his composure.

"Well, what are you going to do now?" he challenged.

"For about the first time in my life, I'm going to take some advice," the reporter answered. "I was told to hole up in a hotel and wait until a certain young lady gets in touch with my office. I'm going to do that. And when Nita Ayer calls, Harker, I'm going to turn you over to her and see what happens. I don't know for certain but I have a

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hunch she will be greatly interested in you, Harker; and no doubt you are interested in her. When I get you two together, there is a chance that some of this damned mystery may be cleared up."

"Y—you—" Harker choked. "Y—you're going to turn me over to Nita Ayer!" In his voice was horror.

Reed smiled grimly. He surveyed the consternation on the man's face. "Does that jab you in the quick?" he asked. "Well, well. How interesting!"

CHAPTER VIII

The Sons of Destiny

REED, cat-napping on the bed and calling his office at hourly intervals to find out if Nita had as yet left a telephone number for him to dial, spent a miserable night. His only consolation was that Harker was even more miserable. The reporter had half-way hoped that misery might loosen Harker's tongue but not once during the night did the man break his self-imposed silence. Nor did Harker sleep. He seemed to be engrossed in his own thoughts. Meanwhile he waited.

At seven o'clock, Reed again called his office and was informed that there was no message from Nita. After making certain that Harker was securely tied, Reed taped the man's mouth shut to keep him from calling for help, then went out for breakfast. The sleepy night clerk looked at him as he went out but gave no sign of recognition. In this hotel they never asked questions.

On the street outside, Chicago was coming to life. Traffic arteries, pumping blood to the heart of the city, were beginning to quicken their beat. The streets, almost deserted overnight, were starting to take on animation. The tides of life were flowing in to the heart of the city; at dusk they would flow out again, in a great rhythm.

Reed went into a small breakfast, ate slowly.

"Coffee and a sweet roll to go," he told the waiter.

That was for Harker.

Returning to the hotel, he stopped in a drug store and bought a razor and blades. Then he went back to his room. Harker was patiently waiting for him. The man had not moved.

"Want some breakfast?" the reporter asked, removing the tape from the man's mouth and freeing one arm enough for Harker to feed himself. Harker nodded. He ate the sweet roll, drank the coffee in silence. Reed stared at him in growing wonder.

Shaving in the bathroom, Reed watched Harker through the open door. The man was quietly drinking coffee. When he finished, he sat the empty cup on the table, leaning forward in the chair so that his half-free arm would reach the table. Then he resumed his original position.

The oddity of the situation struck Reed forcibly. Through the open windows of the bathroom he could hear sparrows chirping, he could hear the rattle and the bang of the awakening city. Everything was just exactly as it had always been on a morning in Chicago. Down on the streets thousands of people were hurrying to work. Here in the bathroom he was shaving, the most common-place occupation imaginable. In the other room, clearly visible through the open door, the most mysterious man he had ever met was sitting.

If the people of Chicago, the kids rushing to play, the mammas shaking table-cloths over the back porch, the papas on the way to work, knew that a man who possessed Harker's powers existed among them, there would be the

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damnedest stir the world had ever seen. But they didn't know about Harker. They didn't know that such a person existed. And Reed knew that if he rushed down to the street and cornered the first person he met and tried to tell him about Harker, the man would think he had met a lunatic. If Reed tried to print the story in his paper, the only result would be that the managing editor would advise him to take a nice long vacation. Not even his reputation as a reporter would get the true story about Harker past the editors.

What—the thought struck him—was Harker's true story. Who was the man? What was he? Was Harker—his mind fumbled with the thought and almost refused it—was Harker *human?* Or, as many of the old legends said, did strange monsters go upon the earth in human form?

Of the millions in Chicago, no one else might believe in Harker. Reed believed in him. He had seen the *hurthen* hanging motionless in the air, he had seen the black wall of nothingness barring the exit from the man's study, he had heard Harker talk, weirdly, of the sons of destiny, he had seen the fear on the man's face when he saw what he called the bracelet of power.

Who and what was Harker? Reed did not know the answer to these questions. Somewhere there was an answer. He would find it. He had flung himself head-first into a mystery madder than any ever conceived by the mind of man; grimly he intended to plow through to a solution. The answer would come in its own good time. In the meantime, he continued shaving.

THE telephone rang.

He almost jerked the instrument off the wall getting to it. It was his office. "Your little chickadee called," a man's gruff voice said. "She left a number for you to call. Regent 0-8491. Hey, Don, what makes with this business anyhow? What are you after? Give out with the information, will you? What's all this funny stuff about?"

"Get off the wire," Reed growled. "I got no time to waste on you." He recognized the voice as belonging to one of the re-write men on the staff. Muttering, the re-write man hung up.

Reed frantically dialed the number he had been given. He heard the phone ring on the other end, waited for an answer. The phone rang again and again. His blood pressure climbed higher each time it rang. Suppose no one answered? Suppose something had happened to Nita? Suppose—

The receiver clicked. "Hello," a cool, clear voice said over the wire.

"Nita!" Don shouted. Nita was on the phone. He would recognize her voice anywhere. He had found her! Or she had found him. Which ever it was, it didn't matter. The only fact that mattered was that he was talking to her.

She laughed and to Don Reed her laughter had in it the musical quality of the tinkle of silver bells. "Don! You sound as excited as a school boy. How are you, my lad, and how are things?"

"I'm fine and things are fine and how are you?" He was a little breathless. After the agony of waiting, the pain of searching, he had found Nita.

"I'm first rate. Where are you?"

"In a hotel. Nita, when can I see you? I've got a million things to ask you."

There was a little silence. When she spoke, her voice had somehow changed. "Are you sure you want to ask those questions, Don?"

Reed caught the change in her voice, the hesitancy with which she spoke.

"Nita," he said quietly, "I want to

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ask those questions and I want them answered. Do you understand? I've got to have them answered. I've seen too much not to have the whole story. I'll go nuts if I don't understand this business. I don't want any more stalling from you, for any reason. Are you going to answer my questions?"

THE wire was silent. Then Nita spoke. "Yes, Don. I will answer your questions, to the best of my ability. I was only making certain that you wanted an answer. Some—some persons who asked, did not really want an answer."

"I can understand that," he said drily.

"You have to have a tough mind, to listen to the answers to those questions. I think you have a tough mind, Don. Otherwise I would not tell you what you want to know, even now. This is strong medicine, my lad, too strong to give you over the telephone. Can you come to see me, Don?" She gave him an address on the west side.

"Of course I can come to see you," he said emphatically. Then he hesitated. This was the time for the explosion. He carefully sought for words to phrase what he wanted to say. "Do you mind if I bring a pal along?"

He kept his voice casual, as though he was asking a slight favor.

"A pal along?" Nita said sharply. "Don, have you taken leave of your senses? Of course you can't bring anyone else with you. What I have to tell you is for your ears alone!"

"But this is different. I'm sort of responsible for this man just at present. Besides—"

He already knew that she was a girl who could make up her mind and keep it made up. He also suspected she was not likely to let him bring anyone else along. Her "No!" rattled the telephone receiver.

"Well, okay," he said. "But Harker is going to be mighty lonely until I get back."

There was a moment of silence. He could hear her catch her breath. "Don!" she spoke sharply. "What was that name you mentioned? What was it?"

"Harker," the reporter answered. "A fellow by the name of James Randolph Harker. At least that's the name he gave me but he may have some others that I don't know about—"

"What do you know about Harker?" she interrupted.

"Nothing much. I went out to see him last night—"

"You went to see him!"

"Sure. He answered my ad about you. He said he could give me some dope— What's the matter, Nita? What are you so excited about?"

She sounded frantic. "Don, where are you? Quickly where are you?"

"At a Loop hotel."

"Oh. You're all right then. For a moment I was afraid— But if you're in a hotel by yourself, you're safe enough. Don, do you mean to say that you located Harker and interviewed him last night?"

"Sure."

"Oh, you— You shouldn't have done it! You should have gone straight to some hotel and stayed there until I got in touch with you."

Listening, the reporter had the impression that she was not thinking clearly. She was telling him that he should not have gone to see Harker, but she did not seem to realize that he had offered to bring Harker with him. Her great concern at the moment seemed to be for his safety. Once she realized he was safe, she remembered what he had said. Then she went completely frantic. "Don!" she almost screamed the words.

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"Did you say you wanted to bring Harker with you?"

"That's right."

"Then he's with you now?"

"Right again."

He got the impression she winced then, as though she had been struck. "I'll get there as quickly as I can, Don. Maybe I'll be in time to save you—" She started to hang up.

"Hey, wait a minute," he yelled.

"But you don't understand. If Harker is with you, you're life is in danger. Every second counts—"

"I don't believe Harker will harm me."

"No?" There was extreme doubt in her voice, as though she was hearing things she did not believe.

"No. Somehow or other Harker got mixed up with some adhesive tape. It's wrapped all around his legs and his arms. I don't know exactly how it happened but I don't really believe he can even walk. As for harming me—"

"Don, do you mean to tell me that you've got Harker tied up?"

"Well, he is tied up and I supplied the tape that tied him."

"He's a prisoner?"

"You might put it that way."

"Don Reed, I'll never forgive you for playing with me like this. Are you honestly holding that man a prisoner?"

"That's what I'm trying to tell you, kitten. I've got him tied up and I've got a gun. I've faithfully promised him I'll blow a hole through him if he as much as bats an eye-lash— Hey!"

"I'll be there as soon as I can get there." With a bang the receiver went on the hook.

REED meditatively hung up his receiver. He looked at Harker. "The little girl is on her way," he said. "Anything you got on your mind that you would like to get off before she gets here?"

"Must you turn me over to her?" Harker whispered. "Isn't there something you want? Wouldn't you like to have money, or fame—"

"The man is offering bribes!" Reed murmured, in mock surprize. "How much, Harker, a million?"

"Two million, if you ask it," Harker was sweating now. "Name your price. I'll pay it. And you need not think I can't pay off. I can. I can give you anything—"

"Well, I'm damned. You really must be afraid of her!"

"I'm not afraid of her. It is those she will bring with her that I fear."

"Ah! I take it she will not come alone?"

"You can be certain she won't come alone. Listen to reason, Reed. Anything you want, I'll give you. All you have to do is take this tape off and let me get out before she gets here. You can say I escaped. She will believe you. She only half-way believes you are holding me prisoner anyhow and if you say I managed to work the tape loose, slugged you, and escaped, she won't doubt that you are telling the truth. I'll give you anything you want—millions—" The man was almost inarticulate.

The reporter shrugged. "No, thanks," he said.

"You—you won't take my offer?"

"I doubt if you could deliver on all these millions you are promising. Anyhow, Harker, it's worth a million to me to see what is going to happen to you when Nita Ayer gets here. I've got more curiosity than sense. And I am very curious about you, and about a lot of other things. I want to know who you are and what you are doing here. I want to know where you got those strange powers you possess. I want to know what is back of you, and

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most of all, I want to know what kind of madness is loose in what I had regarded, up to now, as a sensible, explainable world. No, Harker, money would not satisfy my curiosity— Ah— But how did she get here so quickly?"

Steps had sounded in the hall outside. There was the sharp rap, rap, rap of high heels on the floor, such a sound as is made by a girl going somewhere in a hurry. The doorknob rattled and when the locked door did not open, there was a sharp rap on the panels, and a voice saying, "Don? Open up."

REED opened the door. Nita Ayer came into the room. Behind her, walking silently but with a kind of alertness that somehow reminded the reporter of plainclothes detectives closing in around a dangerous criminal, came two men. One was plainly, almost shabbily, dressed; he was wearing a threadbare brown suit. Half his face was shaved. Bits of lather clung to the uncut whiskers on the other half. He looked as if he had been suddenly interrupted, in the midst of shaving, by a message so urgent he could not wait to complete his toilet. The second man looked prosperous. He was well-dressed in a smart business suit. From his appearance he might have been a broker, or an executive in a successful firm. As they entered the room, each of the men glanced once at the reporter, giving him a quick, measuring look, then paid him no further attention. Like two pointers who have suddenly scented a covey of quail, they looked quickly at Harker. When once they had looked at him, they did not look away. Nor did either of them take his right hand out of his coat pocket.

"Don!" Nita gasped. "You—you really have got him?"

"You got here mighty quickly," the

For an instant the very air seemed to freeze solid as the "thing" lanced down, sharp beak first . . .

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reporter irrelevantly observed.

"We—we came the short way," the girl answered. She was madly excited, and more than a little frightened, though she was obviously trying to hide the latter emotion.

Reed raised his eye-brows but he did not ask what she meant by "the short way." No doubt, when she left the cell in the Wisconsin jail, she had taken the short way out. This was a question that could be answered later. Instead he nodded toward the two men. "Who are your pals?" he asked.

"They work with me. The one in brown is John Schultz. The other is James Adams. Don, I can't begin to tell you what a wonderful thing you have done in capturing that man for us." She seemed disinclined to talk further about her companions.

"Ah, yes," Reed said. "Schultz and Adams. Nice names. They would not by any chance be—" he paused "—sons of destiny, would they?"

He did not know what reaction he expected to get, if any, but he got plenty. Nita's eyes widened in startled surprise. Adams spoke sharply to Schultz. "You take care of that. I'll watch Harker." Schultz turned quickly to the reporter. His hand thrust in his coat pocket, he rapped out.

"Why do you call us that?"

Reed grinned. "What is there to get so excited about?" he drawled.

"Never mind that. Answer my question."

The reporter shrugged. "I still don't see why you should get so excited about it, but if you must know, Harker used the term. He seemed very much afraid of what he called the sons of destiny and since he was just offering me more millions than I could count not to turn him over to you, I thought you might belong to this mysterious organization."

Schultz looked a little relieved, but only a little. "Harker told you?" he demanded.

"Yes."

There was still doubt on the half-shaved face. He looked at Nita. "Do you vouch for this man?" he said nodding toward Reed.

"Yes. I vouch for him," the girl answered quickly. "You surely don't doubt him, do you? After all, he captured Harker."

Schultz was still not satisfied. "Well, if you can vouch for him, I suppose he is all right. I know he captured Harker. That is one of the things I like least. It happens to be impossible for him to have captured Harker." He shook his head.

"Hey, what do you mean?" Reed demanded.

"Let's get out of here," Schultz said. "There's something rotten about this business. I can smell it. Cut that tape off Harker, Adams, and let's take him away from here while we have a chance."

THE two men seemed to work together as a perfect team. Adams had guarded Harker while Schultz questioned Reed. Now Schultz guarded the man while Adams slit the tape that bound Harker to the chair. He worked swiftly. Harker did not seem to be enjoying the situation. His eyes darted constantly from Schultz to Adams. He looked like a trapped rat who sees two executioners approach and does not know from which will come the fatal blow. Harker seemed to have no doubt that the blow was coming. Reed might have felt sorry for the man if he had not remembered Merthu and the way the bronze youth had tried to shrink into the corner of his cell. The reporter also remembered the *hurthen*, with which Harker had menaced him. Whatever happened to Harker, he had

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it coming. Obviously some grim drama of transgress and retribution was here nearing its end. Harker was on the retribution end and he didn't like it.

Reed turned to the girl. "What's biting Schultz?" he asked. "He seems to doubt me."

Nita's face was white. She kept glancing at Harker and glancing away as though she too, sensed the coming retribution and was frightened. "It isn't that Schultz doubts you," she answered. "He knows Harker's powers and—What's the matter with you?"

Reed, looking over her shoulder, saw the door open. Nita did not see it open but she saw the change in Reed's face.

In the open door stood—Samadu! The giant Negro who had served as Harker's butler, Samadu! As silently as he had opened it, he closed the door behind him. In his right hand, he held, no bigger than an agate taw, a ball of cut crystal. Lights were glimmering in its facets and somewhere deep within its frozen depths little hammers seemed to be striking tiny bells that gave off a continuous, angry ringing. The room was suddenly full of the sound. It beat from the ceiling, from the floors, from the walls.

Reed's hand dived for the pistol in his pocket. He did not know how Samadu had gotten here but the giant's presence could have only one meaning—disaster. He grabbed for the snub-nosed pistol in his pocket.

His arm wouldn't move. He was suddenly aware that little tingling pains were racing through his body in rhythm to the ringing of the bells held in Samadu's hand. The startling thought was in his mind that the crystal the giant was holding was somehow keeping him from moving. He fought the thought. It could not, must not, be true. He tried to force his hand into his pocket, so he could use the gun.

His arm would not move. He tried to bring his hand up in front of his eyes, to see what the devil was wrong with it. It wouldn't come up. He tried to lunge at Samadu. Ton weights seemed to be fastened to his feet. In his mind was the horrible thought that somehow he was held motionless.

Nita, standing in front of him, was also frozen motionless. Schultz and Adams, busy with Harker, had suddenly ceased their effort. Angrily the bells were ringing. On Samadu's black face was the ghost of a triumphant smile.

Suddenly there was a burst of laughter in the room, triumphant laughter. Harker laughing.

"Why don't you move?" Harker was jeering. "You sons of destiny, you self-styled watchmen of the night, why don't you do something? Why don't you destroy me? Why do you stand there like fools who have turned to stone?" Again the laughter boomed forth. No one moved. Schultz and Adams were expressionless but on Nita's face was horror.

"They find it difficult to move, eh, Samadu, while the bells are ringing?" Harker exulted. "Something about the sound of the bells seems to keep them from moving?"

The Negro grinned. "Yes, master," he said.

Harker laughed explosively. He seemed to think he was watching the most wonderful joke in the world.

"Well, done, Samadu," he gloated. "You followed my instructions perfectly and we have succeeded in trapping three of our enemies."

REED'S mind reeled at the implication back of the words. They had been trapped. Harker had planned the whole thing. He had analyzed Reed perfectly and had permitted himself to

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be caught, knowing that Reed would turn him over to Nita Ayer. Thus Nita and those who came with her could be lured into a trap. Harker had been using Reed as a tool. Harker, when he had offered bribes to the reporter to release him, had been putting on an act designed to convince Reed of his desire to escape. He hadn't wanted to escape. He had wanted Nita and the others to come to him, so that Samadu, who had no doubt been lurking nearby, could put in an appearance.

They had been tricked. They had been trapped. Schultz, in his dim suspicions, had been right. Reed saw the whole picture. It was a horrible picture. It swiftly became even a more horrible picture. He was aware that Harker, who somehow seemed to be immune to the paralyzing force flowing from the crystal, was patting him on the back.

"Well done, Reed," Harker was saying. "You co-operated splendidly with me. I shall make certain you are well rewarded. Your assistance was invaluable. Without you, the girl and the two men would never have come here."

Harker was saying that Reed had willingly helped him. It was a foul and monstrous lie. There wasn't a word of truth in it. The reporter opened his mouth to call Harker a liar. His mouth wouldn't come open. There was a horrible choking feeling in his throat. He couldn't speak.

He glanced at Nita, begging her with his eyes not to believe Harker. She looked away. He glanced at Schultz and Adams. They looked straight back at him. They couldn't speak but in their eyes was burning bitterness.

Reed choked. Nita, Schultz, Adams, believed he had aided Harker in trapping them. He couldn't defend himself, he couldn't shout that Harker was a liar. He couldn't open his mouth. He couldn't speak.

Again Harker was patting him on the back. "Splendidly done, Reed. Very fine. They didn't even begin to guess, did they, that you were working with me all the time? Look at them, Reed. Don't they look annoyed now that they know you are one of my co-workers? The girl, especially, doesn't she look hot at the way we tricked her? Those newspaper ads fooled her completely, didn't they? She thought you were honestly trying to get in touch with her because you loved her. She didn't know that you inserted those ads, knowing she would answer them, to help me trap her. A wonderful job you did, Reed. A wonderful job!"

Slap, slap, slap, went Harker's hand on the reporter's back. Reed was aware of a whisper in his ear. "This is my revenge on you, fool, for trying to meddle in my business. The girl you love thinks you are a traitor—how is that for revenge?"

Slap, slap, slap, went Harker's hand on the reporter's back.

CHAPTER IX

Harker's Offer

WHILE the hammers beat in the crystal Samadu was holding, Harker made a swift but thorough search of the three. From Adams' right coat pocket, and also from Schultz, he removed pistols. The guns did not seem to interest him. He tossed them contemptuously on the bed. From Adams' vest pocket he removed something that did interest him, greatly—a large gold watch. Eagerly he screwed off the back of the watch.

"Ah!" he said, glimpsing what was inside. "So your power bracelet was made into a watch! I suspected as much. Too bad, wasn't it," he jeered,

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"that the radiations from the crystal kept you from using your power? Of course, if you had gotten to your watches, and adjusted them so that they cancelled the radiations from the crystal, it would have been a different story, wouldn't it? But you couldn't move! Isn't it remarkable that for the lack of the ability to move your hand as little as six inches—far enough to reach into your vest pocket—you have come to grief?"

Harker roared with laughter. Teasing his helpless victims, he was enjoying himself hugely. Neither Adams nor Schultz showed any emotion whatsoever. They seemed not even to hear the man. Harker finished his search with Nita. From her purse he removed a bracelet.

"How nice of you to give me this, my dear!" he gloated. He eyed her appraisingly and for the first time he seemed to become conscious of her beauty. He smacked his lips. "I did not realize you were so handsome a wench. Perhaps—" His eyes narrowed. "—Perhaps, when we reach our destination, we may be able to discover some way to save you from what will otherwise be an unfortunate fate. What do you say, cutie?" he laughed, and reaching forward, chucked her under the chin. "Maybe you and I can get together?"

A slow, red flush crept over Nita's cheeks. Otherwise she gave no indication that she had heard him.

Reed raged in silent, helpless fury.

"We will go now," Harker said. "You three go first. Samadu, change the tuning of the crystal to permit them to walk but do not permit them to cry out. No, wait, Reed. I want to talk to you a minute."

Samadu manipulated the crystal he was holding and the chiming of the tiny bells changed in tone. Deep in his body Reed felt a lessening of hellish pressures. Coiled tensions relaxed in his legs. A tingling, like that felt when a foot has gone to sleep, manifested itself. His breathing, which had been exceedingly difficult, became easier.

"Ladies first," Harker said politely. Nita Ayer, Adams, and Schultz walked out of the room. Samadu followed close behind them. He had thrust the hand holding the crystal into his coat pocket and the chiming coming from it was now muffled and indistinct. Apparently the radiations were no less effective, for the three men and the girl walked like stiff automatons who can barely drag their legs. To anyone watching them they were merely silent people walking down a hall. No threat was obvious, indeed Samadu's air, as he followed them, was one of casual indifference. Reed could not help wondering how often in the history of the earth other men and other women had walked as these three walked, through crowds of people who did not suspect the hellish tragedy that was taking place.

He felt Harker's hand in his coat pocket.

"Your gun," Harker said. "You did not think I would forget that, did you? Of course I did not wish the others to see me take it from you because that would tell them that you did not betray them. We would not want them to know that, would we, especially the girl?"

"Y—y—you g—go to hell!" Reed rasped. It was all he could force out of his lips.

Harker laughed. He slapped the reporter on the shoulder. "Come, my good man," he said briskly. "We must not make the sons of destiny wait on us, must we?"

Reed walked stiffly out of the room. In his mind was a thunderous thought.

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Harker had taken his pistol. But Harker had completely forgotten to take the power bracelet away from him!

IN FRONT of the hotel they entered a taxi-cab. Nita, Adams, and Schultz sat in the back seat and Reed, Harker, and Samadu crowded into the jump seats. Harker gave his own address as their destination and the driver looked pleased. He was getting a long haul and with six people in his cab, he could expect a generous tip. Nita, Adams, and Schultz sat glumly, their faces showing only the muscular tension resulting from the effect of the radiations flowing from the crystal. Samadu sat silently. Harker beamed.

"A nice day, isn't it. Pleasantly cool and the air is very bracing this morning. Or I find it that way. Don't you?"

No one else found it that way.

They rode east from the Loop, passed over the viaduct above the Illinois Central tracks. Down below them Reed could see suburban trains shuttling into town, bringing the ten o'clock business men to their offices. Behind them the imposing sky-line of Michigan Avenue was bright in the morning sun. They passed through Grant Park, turned south along the Lake Shore Drive.

A soft breeze was ruffling the surface of Lake Michigan. Far out two tiny sailboats, taking advantage of the breeze, were scudding along, their sails white against the soft green of the lake. Some mornings the lake was green, some mornings it was blue, and again it was gray, like a far-off hazy sky. It had a wide choice of colors, did this lake. This morning it was a soft green. Far out, the dim bulk of a ship was visible, an ore freighter hustling north for another load of Mesabi iron. The furnaces in South Chicago were hungry gluttons and no freighter charged with aiding in keeping their maws full of iron ore ever had time to rest.

Unconsciously Reed watched the familiar scenes unfold before his eyes. In his mind was the unconscious thought: would he ever see all this again? Was he looking for the last time at the sky-line of Chicago, at the lake lapping gently against the huge stone blocks that guarded its shores? Nita, and those two strange men she had brought with her, were they also seeing all this for the last time? Schultz, in his thread-bare suit, Adams, who looked like a successful executive, and Nita Ayer, who looked like she belonged in the movies, were they looking their last at the world around them? Were they taking their last ride? Were they on their way to the executioner? If they were taking their last ride, their faces showed no fear of it. What was it Harker had angrily said. "You sons of destiny, you are always cool and calm! Don't you know the meaning of fear?" At the time, Harker had thought Reed was a son of destiny, or had pretended to think so. It was hard to tell when Harker was pretending and when he was telling the truth but he had seemed to be telling the truth when he had indicated the sons of destiny were without fear. Certainly Schultz and Adams showed no trepidation. Reed wondered from what well of courage they drew their strength. What secret did they know that enabled them to ride to death without a tremor?

They drew up in front of Harker's residence. Samadu paid the driver, a twenty-dollar bill, and waved his hand to show that he wanted no change. The driver grinned happily.

INSIDE the house, Samadu directed Nita, Adams, and Schultz through a door at the rear of the entrance hall. Reed started to follow but Harker stopped him. "Come into my study,"

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Harker said. "I want to talk to you."

Involuntarily the reporter looked up toward the ceiling, looking for the *hurthen.*

"You are searching for my little friend?" Harker said, interpreting his glance. "He is here all right but he is not so easy to see this morning. He shrinks from the full light of day, preferring to remain in shadows as much as possible. But let us not waste time discussing him. It was for another purpose that I brought you here. Sit down, man, and make yourself comfortable."

Reed stiffly sat down. Now that Samadu and the bells of the ringing crystals were gone, his body was again his to command. He looked at Harker, wondering what the man wanted now.

Harker sat down at his desk. There was a briskness about him like that of an executive who is about to embark on a big deal. He crossed his legs and looked thoughtfully at Reed. "You are a newspaper man, are you not?"

"Yes."

"A reporter, and I believe a good one."

"I'm a reporter. How good I am I leave to others to judge."

"Ah, yes. You work for the Globe, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Fine. How would you like to own the paper?"

Reed blinked. What nonsense was this? Own the Globe! The paper was worth millions! The owner was a millionaire. "What are you getting at?" the reported said grumpily.

"I am, as you express it, getting at exactly what I said. How would you like to own the Globe?" Harker beamed fondly at Reed as though, in his opinion, he had asked a sensible question.

The reporter grinned. "Naturally I would like to own the Globe," he said. "Will you buy it for me?"

"Yes," Harker said cheerfully.

Reed leaned back in his chair. Was Harker mad? Was he hooting crazy? Own the Globe!

"Of course you understand I will not really buy the paper for you. Direct purchase might be difficult. The owner is probably unwilling to sell. But if the owner should die, his widow would inherit the paper. I happen to know she is a flighty, hare-brained individual, totally unable to undertake the management of so valuable a piece of property. Under such circumstances, it would not be too difficult to manipulate the paper so that it would start losing money. Once the paper starts losing money, the widow would be eager to sell. With the backing of those whom I would send to you, it would not be difficult for you, an experienced, responsible newspaper man, to head a syndicate to purchase the paper, at our price. In this way control of the paper would pass completely into your hands."

REED stared in amazement at the man. It was a fiendishly ingenious scheme that Harker had proposed. Worst of all, it was a scheme that had an excellent chance of succeeding, once it was set in motion. John Hastings was the owner of the Globe and Mrs. Hastings was everything that Harker said she was. They had no children to inherit after them. If Mr. Hastings died, Mrs. Hastings could be relied on to make a mess of the newspaper that would fall into her hands. Reed shivered.

"Mr. Hastings," he casually observed, "to the best of my knowledge is enjoying excellent health. He is not likely to die merely to further your schemes."

"Isn't he?" Harker said. "Well, well. The truth is, Mr. Hastings has a bad heart, a condition that even his doctors

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do not suspect. While apparently enjoying excellent health, he is likely to drop dead any minute."

Reed sat in silence for a moment. "The truth is," he said slowly, "that Mr. Hastings is in first class physical condition and there is nothing wrong with his heart. The truth is, your scheme involves murdering him."

Harker shrugged. "If you want to put it that way, yes. But I assure you his death will be due to heart failure and I also assure you the best doctor in the country will not be able to say he did not die of heart failure." He spread his hands deprecatingly. "I have methods—"

"Ah," Reed said. His face was calm and impersonal. "Why do you pick me for this honor?" he asked. "Would it not be possible to find other tools better fitted to your needs?"

"I have picked you for two reasons," Harker answered. "One, you are already aware of my existence and my powers. Two, you have a hard, driving type of intelligence that appeals to me. As to your questions about finding someone else better fitted to my needs, it is not easy, even with the rewards I can offer, to find a capable man who is willing to serve me. I can use only the best. Fools will bungle my plans. You are not a fool, and I am frank to say, you would make a first-class assistant for me."

"Thank you," Reed said. "But there is one point that is not clear to me. If you give me the Globe, what do *you* get out of it? Where do you come in? What do you gain?"

Harker laughed. "A logical question, my boy. What do I get? I get control of the material published in your paper. The Globe is a powerful influence in this city and in this state. It has a large reader following and it can control and mould public opinion. I get control of its power."

Reed nodded He could understand this with no difficulty at all. The Globe was a crusading newspaper. It fought civic corruption, graft. Politicians contemplating putting a finger in the public till shuddered for fear that those lean, hot-eyed men employed by the Globe would discover what was going on and expose it in print. Gangsters left town hurriedly when the Globe got on their trail. Not a day dawned but that the editorial writers dipped their pens in gall and set out to joust with evil. There was no question but that a great liberal newspaper was a power for good in any community. There was no question in Reed's mind but that the Globe would cease to be a power for good, with Harker ordering the policies of the paper.

"Do you have any other questions?" Harker asked. "You must realize, my boy, that I want you to have a full and complete understanding of the situation. I want your full co-operation. Anything short of full co-operation is inadequate for my needs. Hence I welcome your questions."

"I have lots of questions," the reporter answered. "The biggest one is: Who is back of you? I do not for one minute believe that this is all your own idea. There must be someone back of you. Who is it?"

Harker's eyes glittered. "Are you sure you want that knowledge?" he asked.

"Quite sure," the reporter answered. It was the one piece of knowledge that he desperately wanted. Who was back of Harker? From what source did he draw his tremendous powers?

HARKER'S fingers drummed on the desk top. His lips were pursed into a frown. "The One who is back of me," he said slowly, "is old on this

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earth. He was here before the earth was here. Names do not matter. In the long centuries He has had many names. Even I do not know His true name, or the full circumstances of His being. He does not choose to reveal this even to His most faithful followers, of which I count myself one. He sustains us, He gives us knowledge, He gives us power that we may work His will. Through Him are all things possible. But His name—" Harker paused and his voice dropped to a whisper as though he suspected the presence of a hidden listener who might overhear him. "His name I do not know. I can only call Him, as others call Him, the Power of Darkness."

His voice whispered into silence, and Reed, sitting stiffly in the chair, was aware of a feeling of coldness numbing every muscle in his body. The Power of Darkness! The Ancient One. Janicot. Eblis. He knew a few of the names bestowed upon this being. In his mind, ever since he realized the terrible strength that Harker possessed, was the fear that back of the man there could only be the Power of Darkness. A shuddering, soul-shaking fear! Now, from Harker's own lips, the fear was confirmed. Reed's heart turned to ice in his chest and cold winds blew over his body. He swallowed, fighting the fear that was in him.

"And I," he forced the tremor out of his voice, "as owner of the Globe, shall serve this One?" He questioned. "That is the pact you make with me?"

"Yes," Harker answered. "You shall serve me and through me, you shall serve Him."

Reed sat in silence. His face gave no indication of what was passing in his mind. Harker, watching him closely, saw this with approval. In seeking a new convert, Harker had chosen well. Harker needed men with steel nerves, men who could control themselves.

"Supposing," Reed said slowly, "supposing I pretend to accept, and then play you false? What means do you have for controlling me?"

Harker laughed. "You have seen my little friend?" he questioned. "Well, one of my little friends will go with you always. If ever you are tempted to disobey me, you will have the knowledge that lurking near you is something that can enforce my will. Under those circumstances, I do not believe you can say I have no means of controlling you, can you?"

"No," Reed shuddered. His eyes went again to the corner of the room, where something gray and sinister might be lurking. Or might not be. "No."

"Any other questions?" Harker said briskly.

"Yes. Supposing—" the reporter's voice faltered. "Supposing I—I do not choose to accept your offer? What then?"

"Then," said Harker, "You are a dead man. Before you could hope to move from that chair, you are a dead man." He waved a hand. "I assure you, my little friend is near. I assure you he is ready and waiting eagerly."

As he spoke Reed felt a terrible coldness near him. The *hurthen*. It touched him, seemed to draw back. And if the *hurthen* failed, he did not doubt that Harker had other weapons at his command, other forces he could call into action.

"What do you say?" Harker asked.

"What can I say?" Reed answered. "That I accept your offer? Of course!"

"Good," said Harker briskly. "I anticipated that you would accept. In order that I may observe your loyalty, that you may give proof of your sincerity, I have saved a task for you to perform. Your first task for me. Think

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of it! The first of many tasks!"

"W—what is it?" Reed choked.

"The execution of Adams, of Schultz, and of Nita Ayer," Harker answered. "Samadu is holding them in the basement. You shall have the privilege of executing them!"

"The execution—"

Harker rose from his desk. He bowed politely. "You may precede me to the basement," he said. "Come now. Remember the wealth that is to be yours. Put a good face on this matter and precede me out of the room."

Reed rose slowly to his feet. Harker was taking him to the basement, to execute—his mind refused the thought completely. He could not, would not think, of executing Nita. But if he did not, Harker would certainly kill him.

CHAPTER X

In the Basement

A GLOOMY stairway led down to the basement and at the bottom there was a heavy oak door.

"Open up, Samadu," Harker called.

The door opened. Bowing the Negro stood to one side. Reed entered the large, dimly-lighted basement room. His first impression, confirmed by the sudden tension in his muscles, was the sound of the tiny bells ringing in the crystal. Samadu was holding his prisoners by means of the hellish radiations that paralyzed the muscles. Reed saw the prisoners. They were sitting quietly on a bench at one end of the room. Each of the was looking straight ahead but Nita glanced at him as he entered the basement, then looked quickly away. Reed could not look at her. He looked instead at the objects in the basement.

Set against the wall on one side was a complicated-looking device that somewhat resembled a compact but very powerful r a d i o transmitter. Three heavy electrical cables r a n from a switch on the wall into the device, apparently feeding current into it. Reed glanced at the set-up and the vague impression flitted across his mind that Harker was maintaining a secret radio transmitter. He looked for an antenna system and did not see one, unless the four posts rising a foot from the floor at the farther end of the room served the purpose of an aerial. The posts were of metal. They were set in insulated sockets in the concrete floor, forming an area about four feet square Strands of metal cable connected their tops and two other strands of cable ran from them to the transmitter set against the wall.

The oddest object, the most nearly incomprehensible thing in the basement was—an ordinary spring-board! Reed had seen hundred of similar boards. Every swimming pool had two or three of them. Every roto-gravure section ever printed in the country had a picture of at least one bathing beauty diving off such a board. This was a spring-board all right. But there was no water under it. The only thing under it was the hard concrete of the basement floor. Its free end was about two feet above the concrete and was directly above the square area formed by the four metal posts. On the other side of the room eight or ten chairs, placed against the wall, were so arranged that persons sitting in them would form an audience for whatever took place here in this basement.

Reed stared in bewilderment around the place. He had expected to find instruments of torture here, the rack and the thumbscrew, torture devices more in keeping with Harker's sadistic viewpoint. Instead there was a diving board set above a concrete floor. Did

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Harker intend to force his victims to dive from the board and break their necks against the concrete? The idea was so crazy that it somehow brought relief of the frantic tension in Reed's mind. No, Harker was not going to execute his victims by having them jump off the board and break their necks by hitting the floor.

How was he going to execute them? How was he to be stopped? Reed's mind kept coming back to a single thought—the power bracelet in his coat pocket. There was strength in those moonstones bound in their circling metal. The *hurthen* had fled from the bracelet and Harker had manifested a sincere respect for it. Nita had given it to him to protect him. Whether it sprang from magic or from cold, hard science, there was power in the bracelet.

The only difficulty was—*Reed did not know the secret of controlling that power!* He was like a savage who has found a high-power rifle in the jungle. Now the savage is faced with a lion. If he could use the rifle, bring it to his shoulder, release the safety, aim it, press the trigger gently, he could kill the lion and save his life. But if he can only think of the rifle as a rather strangely-shaped club and tries to use as he would use a club, he wastes the splendid power in the gun—and forfeits his own life. Reed could only think of the bracelet as a bracelet. He knew there was power in it but he did not know how to release the power, or what would happen if he did release it.

"Well, well," Harker said, beaming. "Here we are all together," He looked at the three sitting on the bench. "I can't begin to tell you how pleased I am to have you here. Many times I have dreamed of catching a single son of destiny but alas, until now good fortune has not come my way. Imagine my pleasure at capturing not one but *three* members of that organization at the same time! Three, mind you. Three at once!"

HE SOUNDED quite happy about it. Then he looked across the room to the chairs against the wall and shook his head. "My colleagues would also relish witnessing this. I regret, however, that there is not time to summon them this morning. You understand," he bowed mockingly, "we sometimes hold little contests down here. My colleagues find these contests interesting and they will be annoyed when they learn one was held when they were not present."

No one spoke. The silence of the three on the bench seemed to irritate Harker but he kept his irritation under control. "Mr. Reed," he said suavely, "has volunteered to assist me in this contest."

"That's a dir—" The reporter caught himself. He had started to say, "That's a dirty lie!" but he managed to stifle the words before they left his lips.

"What did you say?" Harker demanded.

"Nothing," the reporter answered. The radiations from the crystal that Samadu held were getting to him. His muscles seemed to be slowly freezing. "I said," he whispered, "that darned crystal—can't you fix it so it doesn't affect me? I can barely move."

The glitter in Harker's eyes relaxed. For a moment he stared at Reed suspiciously. Then he reached into his pocket. The reporter caught his breath. Was Harker reaching for a gun?

Harker's hand appeared. It held an ordinary finger ring. "Forgive my forgetfulness," he said apologetically. "I had forgotten that you were not yet immune to the radiation. Put this ring on your finger. It will counteract the effect of the crystal."

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Harker himself slipped the ring on Reed's hand. It looked like an ordinary signet ring of the kind worn by thousands of men but something had been built into it that no jeweler ever put into an ordinary ring. As soon as it was on his finger, his muscles began to thaw.

"Thank you," the reporter said huskily. He dared to breathe again. If Harker had not given him the means to counteract the effect of the radiations, he would not have been able to use the bracelet. Not that he knew how to use it anyhow, but as long as he could move, he could use it if he had a chance. And failing in the use of the bracelet, as a last resort he could throw himself at Harker's throat. He wondered how long he would live after that? Not long, he guessed, but that didn't matter, not if he could save Nita.

"I suggest," Harker said, "that we begin our contest." Beaming jovially, he moved to the radio transmitter set against the basement wall. The eyes of the three on the bench followed him. Now, for the first time, there was fear in them.

"Do you understand the little game we play down here?" Harker asked. "Ah, you don't understand it? That is too bad. You really must understand it so you can appreciate what is happening. First," he indicated the instrument beside which he was standing, "I close this switch, so."

He closed the switch. Immediately the soft hum of a transformer became audible in the room. Behind the dark panel of the transmitter, vacuum tubes began to glow with a dull, and then brilliantly crimson light.

"We must wait a few seconds for the tubes to warm," Harker explained. "Ah, I see they have already begun to heat."

HE GLANCED from the device to the four metal posts set in the floor. Reed followed the line of his gaze. Between the four posts, something—he could not tell exactly what—was happening. At first he thought his eyes were blurring. From each post fingers of darkness were reaching out.

Reed gasped. Shocked recognition leaped into his mind. He had seen those fingers of darkness before. They had reached toward him when he had opened the door of Harker's room and had tried to escape. They had lurked behind the windows, and Harker, when he recovered consciousness, had said they represented nothingness.

Had the veil of blackness that guarded the study above been generated here in this room? It seemed likely. At the time, the reporter thought he run head-long into black magic but it seemed now that the magic had a sound foundation in science. It was none the less real and hideous for all its scientific background.

From post to post the fingers of blackness reached, joined hands, spread out, until they formed a curtain of darkness four feet square. Black as a pool of ink, the ebony curtain hung a foot above the floor—and a foot below the end of the springboard.

Reed, remembering what Harker had told him about this blackness saw the horror that was lurking here. His flesh crawled.

Harker laughed. "Neat, isn't it?" he questioned. "I got the idea from a stunt the pirates used to pull in the old time. When the pirates had taken captives aboard their ship and had no further use for them, they had a clever way of getting rid of them. They lashed a strong plank to the deck, with the free end extending overboard—Ah, I see from your faces that you have

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caught the idea! Yes, this is a modern version of walking the plank. A person walks out to the end of the springboard and either steps off of his own will or is aided to step off—into the pool of blackness! What happens after that? I really have no idea." He chuckled deep in his throat. "I really have no idea what happens after that. *Something* happens. I am sure of that."

Again the chuckle sounded. "How glum you look, you sons of destiny!" Harker ejaculated. "How pleased my colleagues would be if they could only see your faces now!"

He was a madman laughing at the horror his helpless victims felt. And yet it was not madness that motivated him. His power and his sadistic ruthlessness came not from madness but from One who dwelt in darkness.

"Are we all ready?" Harker called out. He left his place by the radio transmitter and came and stood in front of the three who sat silently on the bench. "Who shall be first?" he inquired, rubbing his hands together in a kind of sickening ecstacy. "Shall it be you?" he pointed at Adams. "Or you?" This time the finger was aimed at Schultz. "Or you?" He looked at Nita Ayer.

Silence was heavy in the room. Samadu, standing to one side and guarding the crystal, licked his lips in anticipation. He was cut from the same cloth as his master and what Harker enjoyed, Samadu would also enjoy.

"Would you like to go first?" Harker again asked the girl.

Her lips moved. A whisper was all she could utter. "I am ready," she said.

Harker looked slightly chagrined at her answer. He hid it with a smile. "Of course," he said, and his words dripped oil, "you really do not have to go at all. You are far too beautiful to step into the blackness. If you but say the word, you can stay here, with me."

Again her lips moved. "No!"

Harker's face writhed with anger. "You fool! Don't you realize that black curtain is an entrance to another universe, that those who go into it enter into His realm? Don't you know that penetrating that curtain will blot you out completely?"

"I know," Nita said wanly. "I prefer that, to being false to the One to whom I owe allegiance. I prefer nothingness, to you."

SLOWLY, painfully, she rose to her feet. For a second Harker glared at her. Then he stalked over to the chairs placed against the wall. "If anyone should need assistance in walking the plank, Mr. Reed will provide it. He volunteered for that task, and I granted him the privilege. If anyone needs any urging, Mr. Reed will provide that too. On with the show."

Crossing his legs, Harker leaned his chair back against the wall.

Slowly, as though every move was an effort, Nita stepped on the springboard. She stumbled and almost fell.

"Here, Nita, let me help you," Reed said. He sprang to her side tried to take her arm.

She shook his hand aside. "No thank you, Mr. Reed. I do not need any help from you, either."

"But you do—"

"No! Keep your hands off of me. I've come this far by myself and I can go the rest of the way."

She looked at the reporter and through him and did not see him.

"Nita—" he whispered. There was desperation in his voice. As soon as he realized the purpose of the springboard and the part he was to play in the performance, he had conceived of

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a plan that might, possibly, save the situation. His plan was to help Nita as she walked along the board, to take her arm and offer his assistance. While he was doing this, he would slip her the power bracelet. She would know how to use it. Harker, across the room, would not see what was happening until the bracelet was in her possession.

But in order to keep Harker from seeing him slip the bracelet to her, he had to pretend to help her along the plank.

She wouldn't accept his help! She wouldn't let him take her arm. She wouldn't let him touch her!

"Don't speak to me!" she whispered. "I—I thought—you—" There were tears in her eyes.

Harker seemed to enjoy the scene. "Very good!" he called out, clapping loudly.

"Let me help you, Nita," the reporter begged.

"You want to help me—to that?" She nodded toward the inky pool a foot above the floor.

Reed could not speak.

"Of course he wants to assist you to the opening!" Harker called out. "It is the last thing he will ever be able to do for you. Come, my dear! Take his arm and stroll down to the end of the plank. When you reach the end, he can have the pleasure of shoving you off." The idea was apparently very pleasing to him for he roared with laughter.

"Would you shove me off?" Nita asked.

"No," Reed whispered desperately. "Listen, Nita—"

"What are you saying?" Harker shouted. "Speak louder. I don't want to miss a word of this."

The girl looked irresolutely from Harker to Reed. "I'm just making a show for you to enjoy," she whispered. "Well, I won't make a show any longer!" She started walking along the springboard.

Reed grabbed her arm. "Not so fast," he said. "Mr. Harker and I are enjoying this. We want it to last as long as possible."

He thrust the bracelet into her hand.

She felt the warmth of the moonstones against her skin. A little start passed through her body. She stopped trying to pull free. Her eyes darted to Reed's face, held there with an intensity he had never seen before. Then, as though to reassure herself that what she thought had happened was really true, she glanced down at the object he had pressed into her hand—and saw the moonstones glowing softly with that subtle inward light they seemed to possess.

For a split second, while Reed watched, she stopped breathing.

IT WAS one of the few times in his life when Reed was praying. Was there the power in the bracelet that he thought was there? Was there enough power, in some incredible way, to overcome Harker? Was the power usable? Or had he waited too long to give her the bracelet? Like the savage with the gun, he could only thrust what he knew was a weapon into the hands of one who did know how to use it, and hope somehow that the gun would stop the lion.

Nita did not move. She stared at the bracelet.

With a crash, Harker's chair came down on the floor. "Hey, what the hell is going on there?" he demanded. "What are you trying to do, Reed? I saw you slip something to her? What was it?"

Nita glanced at the reporter. There had been tears in her eyes. Now the tears, miraculously, had turned to stars.

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"Oh, Don—" she whispered.

"If you know how to use that thing, for Pete's sake use it!" the reporter gasped. "This is our last chance."

"Reed!" Harker shouted. "Damn you! If you've double-crossed me! Samadu!"

He was shouting for the giant who served him as a slave.

Nita's fingers slid along the bracelet. She touched one of the moonstones, turned it, ever so slightly, in its setting. Bright lights gleamed in the gems, flashed up like miniature searchlights probing a far-away sky.

Instantly the room was full of sound. Always in the background had been the muted chiming of the bells ringing in the crystal. Now there was a new sound. Now another set of tiny bells were ringing. Bells in the moonstones, as clear and clean and sweet as bells from fairyland. The bells ringing in the moonstones seemed to be fighting the bells ringing in the crystal. There was a clash of tones, a furious ringing, like the sounds of battle far away. There was a sense of struggle, of pushing and shoving, of two antagonists meeting sword and buckler. There was no other sound in the room. It was as though everyone present had stopped dead-still and was waiting the result of some furious far-off battle on which their fate depended. Harker seemed to have become paralyzed. He was staring at the bracelet Nita was holding and he did not seem to believe the evidence of his eyes. He knew it was not possible for her to have a bracelet. Yet she had one.

Too late Harker remembered he had failed to take the bracelet from Reed! "Damn you!" he shrieked. "Samadu!"

The Negro had turned an ashen gray. He had pulled the crystal from his pocket and he was frantically working with it, trying to change or adjust it.

Bell sounds swirled angrily in the room. The bells ringing in the moonstones seemed to grow louder. As they grew louder, the bells from the crystal grew weaker. There was a final swirl of furious chiming. There was a *clink,* as of some object, caught in enormous pressures, breaking.

SAMADU stared at the crystal in his hand. At the final *clink* the crystal had crumbled into fragments. No sound came from it. The only sound in the room was the ringing of the bells in the moonstones. They were ringing triumphantly now!

The silence held for an infinitesimal part of a second. Then there was a scrape, as of some heavy object being kicked aside. Out of the corner of his eyes Reed glimped Adams and Schultz rising from the bench, kicking it away from them, leaping to their feet. The breaking of the crystal had freed them from their paralysis. At the same instant he saw Harker reaching into his pocket.

Reed hurled himself across the basement—toward Harker. His left fist, with all the momentum of his charge behind it, went into Harker's stomach.

"Uck!" the man gasped. He had succeeded in getting his hand out of his pocket and as Reed struck him, something flew from his hand and clattered on the floor. Harker dived after it. The reporter drove his shoulder into him, rammed with all his strength. Caught off balance, Harker crashed into the basement wall. Reed started to hit him again, but as he drew back, he was aware of something rushing between them. Schultz! Like a great shaggy dog, he grabbed at Harker's throat.

Vaguely Reed was aware that Adams had chosen Samadu. Sounds of furious conflict came from the pair, thuds of

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fists meeting flesh, grunts of pain.

Harker clawed at Schultz, seemed to slip, and both of them fell heavily to the floor. They fought in silence, with a ferocity that was appalling. Neither of them was asking quarter, nor would it have been given if it had been asked. The stakes in this fight were mortal. Schultz had Harker by the throat and he hung on. Harker was underneath. He bent his body like a bow, hurled Schultz upward, brought up a knee that struck the other in the groin. Schultz lost his grip and his face turned gray with pain. The blow had been foul, but that did not matter, in this fight. The struggle here was for survival and for something bigger than survival. No holds were barred. Harker, breathing heavily, struggled to his feet.

Reed was waiting. He stepped forward, his left coming up. Under the impetus of the blow, Harker staggered against the wall. The reporter closed in. Mercilessly he rammed home the blows. Smack! Smack! Smack! One after the other, stomach, chin, jaw. Harker struck back at him but the blows were feeble. Strength was going out of the man but hate was not. Reed could sense the hatred with which Harker was trying to fight. Bitter, blinding, burning hate—there was nothing else left in him.

Reed drove his fist home at the corner of the jaw. Harker collapsed. Breathing heavily, the reporter stepped backward. Adams and Samadu were still struggling. When Harker collapsed, Samadu seemed to lose all his courage. He turned, clawed at the basement door, jerked it open, ran heavily up the stairs. Adams followed him. Their feet pounded on the floor overhead. There was a heavy thud as the front door was slammed. Samadu had run and Harker was unconscious.

Reed looked around. Nita had not moved from her position on the springboard. "Times looked kind of tough for the home team, didn't they?" he said. "I thought we were a bunch of goners."

"We would have been, if you hadn't had this," she held up the bracelet. Suddenly she screamed. Reed whirled.

Harker was on his feet again. The man had been playing possum. He hadn't been knocked out. Feet planted wide apart, Harker was standing with his back against the wall. Oddly, though the basement door was open, he had made and was making no effort to escape.

From his lips a torrent of words were pouring, a chant, an invocation to some dark deity. The words were not English. High and shrill, they echoed through the room. Abruptly they ended.

"So you thought you licked me!" Harker screamed. "So you thought you had won."

Answering his chant, answering his invocation, something came from the pool of blackness still hanging above the floor at the end of the springboard. Reed caught a glimpse of it as it emerged. Then he could see it no longer but he knew what it was. A *hurthen!* Before he could move he saw the blackness swirl again and another of the fierce little monstrosities sprang upward into the air.

Hurthen! The *hurthen* came from beyond the blackness. That was their home. They belonged there. Harker had summoned them to his aid.

"Now what are you going to do?" Harker shouted.

Nita was frantically manipulating the bracelet that she held.

"The power of the bracelet will stop one *hurthen*," Harker yelled. "But will not stop a dozen of them. Ah! More of my little friends are coming."

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OUT of the pool of blackness two of the *hurthen* leaped at the same time, leaped upward, were visible for an instant, and then vanished. As they came, the room seemed suddenly to be growing appreciably colder.

Reed hurled himself at the man. In his mind, somehow, was the thought that if he could hit Harker he could stop the *hurthen* from appearing. He was aware that Schultz had staggered to his feet and was trying to help him.

"Pick him up!" Schultz was yelling. "Lift him off the floor."

Harker kicked at them. Reed dodged and moved in. The man's fists flailed off the reporter's head. Somehow Reed managed to lift him off the floor.

"Hurry!" Nita called frantically. "There are too many *hurthen.* I can't keep them all away."

"I've got him!" the reporter yelled. "But what in the hell am I going to do with him?"

He was aware that Schultz was tugging and pushing at him. "Over there!" Schultz shouted. "Over there."

Reed understood. With Schultz helping him, he held Harker above the floor and staggered across the room. Harker realized what was about to happen. He screamed and kicked, slugged, and tried to bite. Reed doggedly held on. Suddenly both he and Schultz let go. Harker fell.

He fell straight into the pool of blackness that hung in the air below the end of the springboard. He was screaming as he fell. His body writhed as he tried to find a grip on the air with which to hold himself away from what was below him. He hit the blackness. It boiled like smoke caught in a whirlwind. He went out of sight into the blackness. The evil closed over him. His screams went into sudden silence.

There was a blur in the air above the veil. *Hurthen,* diving downward into it, were either following their master into the darkness to serve him in the universe that he had said was beyond the nothingness of the veil, or—what was more probably—like carrion-scenting vultures were diving after him to feast off him. Schultz watched them go. When the last one had gone, he staggered over to the device that looked like a radio transmitter, but wasn't, and cut the switches.

The pool of blackness collapsed.

"Very good," said a voice from the doorway. It was Adams who had spoken. The man was out of breath. "Samadu got away," he said. "I chased him but I couldn't—catch him. Very fine, what you did to Harker. Oh, very fine indeed. He'll feast in his own hell tonight, which is exactly where he belongs."

Reed suddenly sat down. He stared from one to the other. "Would you mind," he panted. "Would you mind telling me what this is all about?"

CHAPTER XI

Don Reed Persists

REED opened the door of the old house. Nita smiled at him and passed through. He followed her. She took his arm and they went down the steps together. Adams and Schultz, looking something like grim, gray watchdogs, came behind them.

They left behind them in the basement a piece of electrical equipment that looked like a radio transmitter but wasn't. It had been thoroughly and efficiently smashed. Schultz had seen to that. The house had been thoroughly searched. Adams and Schultz had taken care of that. Reed did not know what they had found, if anything. He had spent the time listening to the story Nita was telling him. The story

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was not finished. It would probably never be finished.

"The sons of destiny have had many names," Nita had said. "We prefer to be thought of as watchmen, for that word more nearly expresses the nature of our task. We are at least as old as the human race on this planet and possibly older. That point is not completely clear."

"You mean you—" the reporter had protested, "You mean *you* are thousands, hundreds of thousands of years old?" He did not want to accept this thought. It was somehow, repellent to him.

The girl had laughed. "Of course not, silly. I'm just as old as I look, and if you want to consult the records, I was born in a little town in Indiana. My father and mother are there still."

Reed had been relieved to hear this. He had been afraid that Nita was—well, he had seen her vanish and he knew that she belonged to an organization that she had said was thousands of years old. Always he had been afraid she was not quite human. A weight lifted from his mind when he learned she was.

"The *organization* is as old as the human race, not its members. The persons who belong to it are quite ordinary people. We are born, we die. The group recruits new members to take up the task of those who can no longer do their job."

"What is this job?" Reed had asked.

"To watch by night," the girl had answered. "To keep guard against the things that go in the night, to make certain that when morning comes the things we put away at dusk will be safe."

Reed knew that she spoke figuratively but it seemed to him that the figure of speech was uncommonly apt. To watch by night! To his mind came the picture of shepherds guarding their flocks during the hours of darkness. Wolves, and other bad things, came in the night. The shepherds had to ward off the wolves. The sons of destiny were watchmen who guarded the night. He had suspected as much. It made him feel good to know that somewhere there were watchmen.

"Harker and the One whom he served," Nita had shuddered when she mentioned the One whom Harker served. "Seek to corrupt and destroy. Our name for the One whom Harker served is the Antagonist, the Enemy. In the days that have gone He has had many servants. Harker was but one servant. We, in turn, have our Master, whom we serve."

SHE had paused there and had seemed to be groping for words. When she continued, she had spoken slowly. "To understand our part, the part of our Master, the part Harker played, and the part of the Antagonist, is to understand the full purpose of human life on earth, its origin, its meaning, and its destiny. I do not fully understand—the scale is too vast. The earth is a stage, in a setting that involves millions of years of time, a space as high as the sky is high. On this stage drama is in progress. We humans, all of us, are actors in this drama. Somewhere behind the scenes, completely off the stage we occupy, our Master and the Antagonist are striving with each other to determine the course the drama shall take, and its final outcome."

In Reed's mind were words. "All the world's a stage and the men and women merely players. Each has his exits and his entrances—"

"Another way to think of it is to visualize a planted field," Nita had continued. "A field of corn. The ground is plowed and harrowed, the seed-bed

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prepared. The seed is planted. Showers come. The grain sprouts, begins to grow. All over the field, tender green shoots begin to appear. The corn is growing. But it must be cultivated, it must be protected. The crows would pull up the tender shoots, the corn borer would attack the ripening ears. Cattle might break into the field—"

She paused. "You must conceive of the stalks of corn being intelligent enough to aid the planter in protecting them. They must give warning when danger comes. Some of them must fight against that danger. Do you follow me?"

"With difficulty," Reed had answered.

"The horrors that walk in Europe and in Asia, these are also difficult to understand, are they not?" she had answered.

The reporter had stared at her. "You mean—"

She nodded. "The One whom Harker served has other servants. They have loosed this destruction. They have loosed it all over the globe." Irrelevantly she changed the subject. "What did Harker offer you when he wanted you to join him?"

"A newspaper!"

"Yes, that sounds like him! The one thing he would most like to control. With it he could sway public opinion, divide us, possibly make us fight each other. The Antagonist would be that much the gainer. He is very clever."

Reed stared grimly at her. There were other questions he wanted to ask, hundreds of them. She answered them without hesitation. The bracelets were made by an obscure technician—obscure so far as publicity was concerned—who was also a watchman of the night. They enabled their wearer instantaneously to transport himself from one place to another. She had used the power in her bracelet to escape from the assassin who had tried to kill her on the street.* Reed had witnessed this murder. She had also used it to escape from jail. The secret of the bracelets was old. In various forms they had been made for thousands of years, the technical details of their construction being passed on from generation to generation. Merthu had been a messenger, sent from the Master. Yes, messengers were sometimes sent, when the struggle was difficult and the world was in turmoil, to aid in the conflict. Was it possible that Joan of Arc had been such a messenger? Nita did not know. She thought it probable. Unfortunately Harker had somehow learned of the coming of the messenger and had destroyed him. No, it was not possible to tell when or where such a messenger would come, or how he would arrive. They had to be on the watch for him. They had to be on the watch for many things.

"But Harker," Reed protested. "When I first met him, he said he came from the hidden world."

"That was the one thing you and no one else would be willing to believe," Nita answered. "He represented the hidden world. He could tell the truth in perfect safety because no one would believe him."

"I guess," the reporter mused, "I guess that is why the sons of destiny,

* Teleportation: the transportation of objects from one place to another through some unknown means, usually in a haphazard manner. Strange, tantalizing hints of the teleportation of humans, with or without their consent, exist. There was a case of a man in New York, seen to walk out of the second window of a hotel, and when he observed that people below were watching in horrified fascination, turning and walking back into the hotel. Table-tilting, in seances, the movement of heavy objects under the same conditions, may be an illustration of this power. The power bracelet of Nita Ayer, among other things, was a means of controlling teleportation, of making it possible for the wearer of the bracelet instantaneously to transport herself elsewhere.—ED.

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the watchmen of the night, do not advertise their presence. No one would believe them."

"That is one reason," Nita admitted, a little sadly. "There is another reason but I do not have the time to explain it now. Any other questions?"

"Hundreds of them," Reed answered. "I'll ask them later."

THEY strolled down the walk outside the house. The sounds, the sights, the smells of the city struck the reporter like a blow. Street cars rattling, cars honking, newsboys shouting the noon edition of the papers. Oblivious of their presence, the world went on.

Reed turned to the girl. "How," he demanded, "does one get to belong to your organization?"

"By refusing to take 'No' for an answer," she said. "It is not easy to join. Harder even than joining it is discovering that it exists. You have to look at the world around you and see the things going on in it. No matter where you look, you will see signs of the struggle between our Master and the Antagonist, the battle which is being fought here with the whole world as a stage. You will begin to wonder why this fight goes on, why living is such a struggle. Eventually you will begin to get hints that some supernatural battle is in progress here on earth. You will want to take sides in this battle. If you are very discerning, you will reason that some kind of an organization must be hidden out of sight somewhere. You will begin searching for this organization. If you discover it, you will find you have already joined it."

"Hey? What's this. If you discover it, you have already joined it?"

"You joined long ago," Nita Ayer said. "When you began digging up crooks and exposing politicians and doing all the thousand and one things that a good reporter does, you joined the organization."

Deep lines of thought furrowed Reed's forehead. He saw, at last, one of the hidden motives that had governed his whole life. Somehow the knowledge made him feel good all over.

"But," he persisted. "The watchers —like Schultz and Adams—and you! How does one become one of these?"

"By persisting!" Nita Ayer answered. "You must realize that such an organization *must* exist. Then you have to begin hunting for it. If you search hard enough, you will find someone who belongs to it. You will tell him you want to join."

"Ah!"

"He will say you are a fool, that no such group exists. He will insist he is right and you are wrong. You will persist. You will not give up. You will keep on trying. All the time you are doing this, you are being tested. If you are not found wanting, you will become a Watcher."

Reed was silent. "Have I persisted long enough?" he asked.

"Yes," Nita Ayer said.

"There are a lot of things I don't know," he continued.

"I will teach you," she answered.

They came down the sidewalk of the old house, and at the street, they turned right. Adams and Schultz looked thoughtfully after them for a moment. Then they grinned and turned and walked in the other direction.

To the casual passer-by, they were a young couple strolling along the street at noon, such a young couple as might logically be looking for an apartment, a place to live, a spot to call home. Adams and Schultz, going in the other direction, were a couple of middle-aged men returning to work after lunch, the duties of the afternoon before them.

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NOW and again Don Reed and Nita Ayer—the name on the mailbox of the neat apartment they occupy is Mr. and Mrs. Donald Reed—in answer to a summons that comes to them by no ordinary means, dress quietly and go forth into the night. They go together, these two, always together, as though they are afraid of being separated from each other. They go forth to danger, but when the summons comes, they do not hesitate. There is work to be done. They remember the chairs placed along the basement wall in the house that Harker occupied. Those chairs mean that Harker had helpers, assistants, colleagues, who must be found.

The search for Harker's helpers goes quietly on. And will go on. As always, since the time the earth first started rolling, there are Watchers in the night.

THE END

BEAUMONT'S HUMAN GUINEA PIG

By H. R. STANTON

IN 1822 men gasped and women fainted after reading of the remarkable inter-stomach experiments being made on the very-much-alive Alexis St. Martin by an enterprising Connecticut army surgeon. The subject was not a suitable one to peruse at the breakfast table in the morning paper. In straight-laced Victorian society, it was considered an indelicate topic for discussion. Yet people could not help talking about it for those experiments were one of the greatest forward steps in medicine; it opened up a whole new field of knowledge.

Before Dr. William Beaumont's findings were made known, scientists were almost completely ignorant about the internal workings of the body—particularly the stomach. Digestion was a mysterious process which never could be fully explained because it had never been studied. The workings of the muscles and bone structure of the body could be learned through the dissection of cadavers. Study could not be made of the stomach's action during life, and after death quick decomposition prevented a proper investigation of that organ. A freak accident played directly into Dr. Beaumont's hands giving him the opportunity no other man of medicine had ever had—to study a live stomach in action!

At a remote trading post on Mackinac Island, between Lake Huron and Lake Michigan, a bullet from an accidentally discharged musket tore a hole in the side of a young French-Canadian trapper, Alexis St. Martin. Dr. William Beaumont, an army surgeon attached to a near-by fort, was called. He found that the bullet had passed through the wall of the victim's stomach. He managed to patch him up, but despite his great skill and patience it was impossible to get the wound to close completely. On healing, a fleshy flap was left which covered the opening into St. Martin's stomach.

A strange idea came to Beaumont. He tossed it over mentally, tried to reject it and couldn't. The idea was a fantastic one, but one fraught with great possibilities. It took more courage and daring than was ever expected of a human being. Perhaps only a man accustomed to the dangers of frontier life and enjoying the leisure of a frontier army post might have thought of it. The freak "lid" over the hole in St. Martin's stomach would enable the doctor to reach directly into the stomach testing it in action. At least a dozen cases of gastric fistula had been previously reported in medical literature, but no one before Beaumont had dared to execute such a plan.

The American doctor discussed the plan with his young patient, and St. Martin agreed to cooperate in the series of experiments which were to determine the nature of the digestive action of the juices of his stomach. Dr. Beaumont tied pieces of food to strings, inserted them into St. Martin's stomach through the flap, and after several hours removed what was left of the food. These experiments lasted over a period of several years. Beaumont's human guinea pig revolted and ran away but was later brought back with tempting offers of higher wages and better operating conditions.

Finally, in December, 1833, Beaumont decided to publicize his findings. Then stationed in Plattsburg, New York, he published at his own expense a cheap edition of one thousand copies of his report on these classic experiments. He supplied science with accurate facts he had discovered in this very novel method of research, facts concerning the digestibility of different foods as well as the composition of gastric juice. Beaumont found that the gastric juice in his subject contained a small amount (about 0.3%) of hydrochloric acid, which aided in the digestion of proteins as well as certain other nutrients. He also observed that fatigue and emotional strain reduced the flow of gastric juice.

Beaumont's findings inspired other scientists of his own and later times to continue and enlarge the existing sphere of knowledge of bodily processes. The medical world owes a great debt of gratitude to Alexis St. Martin, the man who willingly rented his living stomach to science.

* * *

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"I look down at myself—I am becoming a tree!"

TREE'S A CROWD

BY ROBERT BLOCH

WHEN people ask me, "What brings you to Jack's Shack?" I usually answer, "A bicycle."

This is not strictly true. But I certainly don't want to admit I go there for the food they serve. And of course, I can't say I go there to meet Lefty Feep.

Not that I have anything against Mr. Feep. It's just that if I go to Jack's Shack and order a beef sandwich, Lefty Feep is sure to be there. So instead of beef, I get tongue. Lefty always has plenty of tongue in his cheek. Plenty of cheek, too.

That's why I've come to sneak into the restaurant at odd hours, hoping Lefty Feep won't be around to strike up a conversation.

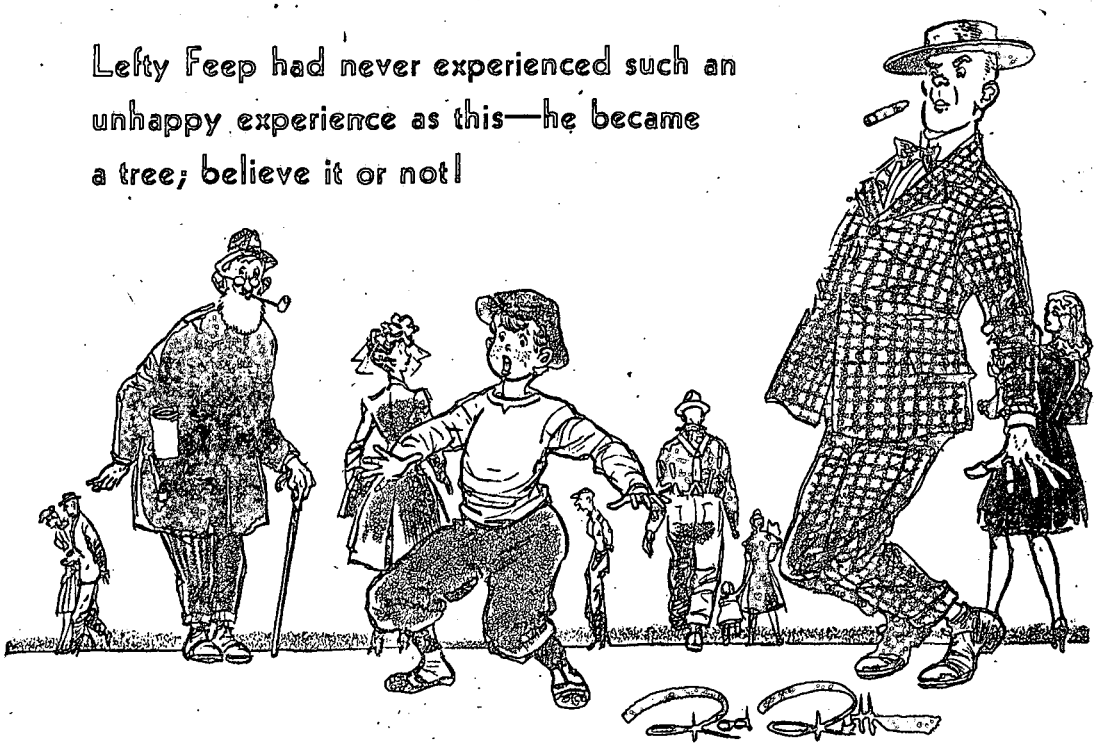
The other day I decided on an early breakfast. Knowing Mr. Feep loves his night life, I figured he wouldn't be up and around at 7 A.M. I strode into Jack's Shack, ordered my meal, and began to eat.

"Is this seat vacant?" chirped a familiar voice.

"Vacant as your mind," I snapped, recognizing the tonsil-splitting tones of Lefty Feep.

Feep grinned and sat down opposite me. I raised my eyes cautiously—a good policy, for his clothes are apt to blind the unprepared eyes of a beholder.

Lefty Feep had never experienced such an unhappy experience as this—he became a tree; believe it or not!



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But today Feep had gone conservative. He wore a neat purple hat with a green band, a yellow shirt, orange tie, and a very mild sky-blue suit with pink stripes.

"Where do you stare?" he inquired, noting my shocked glance at his clothing. "Appraise me of your gaze."

I covered up hastily. "Why, I'm not staring at you," I protested. "I was just wondering what on earth you are doing up at such an early hour in the morning."

"The early worm catches the bird," grinned Feep. "It is all a part of my new system."

"New system?"

"Of course. It is very sensible to get up early," Feep told me. "These mornings I am out of bed by 6 o'clock."

"Really?"

"Of course. I am up at 6. I am shaved, dressed, and down here eating breakfast by 6:30. By 7 o'clock I am all through, and back in bed again. Very sensible."

I blinked and shrugged. "Oh well," I sighed. "What are you eating today?"

"I do not pick my starting selections yet."

"How about some nice breakfast food?" I suggested.

Feep winced and half-rose from his seat, glaring wildly.

"I do not wish to be rude or crude, but I will not touch breakfast food!" he yelled.

"Why not? Everybody eats it."

"Never!" Feep groaned. "I do not wish to start a feud about the food. Let me tell you just why I scorn such corn in the early morn."

"Don't tell me there's a story connected with it," I sighed.

"There is a story disconnected with it," Feep replied.

"Some other time," I said hastily. "I'm not in the mood, just now. I didn't sleep so well last night and—"

"This is a bedtime story," insisted Lefty Feep. "So just lie down and listen."

"I'll do the listening if you'll do the lying," I answered.

Lefty Feep commenced to grin and wobble his chin. I closed my eyes and listened, wishing I could close my ears.

Feep told his tale.

ONE morning a couple of months ago I am running up a high score on the snore when a telephone rings and brings me one of those things.

I shake and awake and grab the receiver in a fever.

"Hello?" I suggest.

"Lefty Feep, you lowdown, good-for-nothing hound! Do you know who this is?"

"I do not recognize the name, but the manner is familiar," I reply.

"This is Joyce."

"All right, Joyce—make with the voice," I groan.

"Listen to me, you scoundrel! You're three months behind on your alimony payments, and unless you send me a check, I'll put you in jail. Make up your mind now. Which do you prefer —checks or stripes?"

"I will be only too happy to take care of you, dear," I mutter. "With an axe." This last I repeat under my breath. But Joyce is so busy giving me the loose abuse that she doesn't notice. I hang up on her and hang my head.

There is no more reason to lay in the hay. I sit there thinking that everybody makes mistakes, but I do worse than that. I not only make mistakes, I marry them. And Joyce is my ex-wife. Now she is handing me the phoney boloney about alimony, and I am in a tight spot. I have large quantities of no money at all, so how will

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I send her a check? With the rubber shortage, I cannot even give her one that bounces.

I am so discouraged by all this that I get dressed and start to shave. Just as I am about to gather my lather, the phone rings again. I answer.

"Hello?" I improvise.

"You dog—you cur—you no good hound!" screams a voice.

"You must have the wrong number, lady. This is not the Animal hospital."

"Listen, Lefty Feep, I'm going to bend you so far out of shape you'll have to change your name to Righty."

"With whom have I the displeasure of shrieking?" I inquire.

"This is your darling ex-wife, Gloria," yells the voice.

"Is that so?" I answer. "Well, what's on your mind besides a henna rinse?"

"You know very well what is on my mind," Gloria squawks. "You are five months behind on your alimony payments to me. Unless I get my money today, I'll wheel you into the Bastille."

"Oh is that all you want?" I purr. "Why, honey, I'll be glad to flash some cash. Think nothing of it."

"I do," she assures me. "I think nothing of your promises, and less of you. Send me that dough or prepare to despair."

I hang up the receiver and wonder whether to do the same with myself.

After all, Gloria is my ex-wife too, and she is entitled to a little consideration, to say nothing of a little strychnine. There is nothing wrong with the woman except that before she is born her mother is frightened by Secretary Morgenthau—and ever since, Gloria is fond of money. Somebody else's money.

I FINISH shaving and decide the razor blade is too dull to cut my throat with. So I apply a necktie, rest my chest in a vest, and tote a coat ready to go outside.

The bell rings and I answer the phone.

Nobody there.

I breathe a sigh of relief.

The bell rings again, and I realize it is the front door.

"Who's there?" I yell, before opening.

"Open up, you snivelling skunk!" squeals a voice.

"Why, Aileen, darling!" I say, recognizing her friendly greeting.

"Open up the door and I will break your thick skull."

"That is your best offer?" I inquire.

"Don't you stall around with me, Lefty Feep! I'm here to collect six months of back alimony! Pay up or lay down—because I'll plug you, you thug!"

"Give me a day of grace," I plead.

"Leave her out of it," snaps my third ex-wife. "You'll give me that check or I'll stretch your neck. How would you like to go to jail?"

"I'd love it," I confess. "At least I will not be listening to you women all the time."

"All right, I am going down now to swear out a warrant."

"Wait," I call through the door. "Give me until tomorrow. I'll see to it that you get what's coming to you."

"That goes double," says Aileen. "Unless you pay me."

I hear her footsteps go away down the hall, and pull my head out from under the covers again.

Then I race my pace out of the house and straight to the office of my lawyer —Bernie the Attorney.

If there is one man who can advise me what to do, it is Bernie the Attorney. He is a legal eagle who lays a lot of eggs—but he is also good at hatching plots. So I fly up to his nest.

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Bernie's office door is closed and I can tell he is busy with a client, so I sit down in the reception room and wait.

I fidget and fume, because there is nothing to read but magazines and newspapers—not a Racing Form in the joint.

I am just opening my mouth to bite the two nails I save for an emergency like this, when the door opens and a guy walks in.

He is a little round butterball with a shiny noggin bare enough to slide a toboggan. He is carrying a brief-case with his name stamped on it in gold. I sneak a peek and read it.

"Herman Hormone."

He sits down, pays no attention to me, and begins to peer into his brief-case with a happy smile.

I am too fidgety to keep still. I must make conversation.

"Pardon me, Mr. Hormone," I say. "I know it is none of my business, but what do you have that is so fascinating in that short-case of yours?"

This is a very crude and rude of me and I expect Mr. Hormone will tell me to go peddle my popsicles, but instead he flashes me a big smile with teeth that do not go off the gold standard.

"I am so glad you are interested, sir," he tells me, giving me an exhibition of his dentition. "You may not be aware of it, but I am Herman Hormone, the inventor."

RIGHT then and there I am sorry I mention the whole thing. In the past I have enough trouble with screwball inventors like my friends Sylvester Skeetch and Mordecai Meetch. And here is another one. I realize he is probably not carrying a brief-case but a grief-case. Still, it is too late to wiggle out of it, and he is giving me his upper and lower plates in a smile.

"My name is Lefty Feep," I say, tipping my cigar politely. "And I am afraid I do not know very much about inventions. They are a little too scientific for me."

"Well, I will be glad to explain," says Herman Hormone, drawing his chair closer. His eyes begin to gleam like a couple of electric eels at mating time.

"I have here," says Mr. Hormone, "the breakfast food creation of the ages."

"Breakfast food?"

"A new creation, an innovation that will be the sensation of the nation for the duration, an inspiration that will require no demonstration for universal acclimation, according to my intimation, but will receive an ovation to stagger the imagination."

My imagination is staggering for some time before he finishes all this. But I manage to force a smile.

"What is this?" I ask.

"Reekies!" says Herman Hormone.

"Reekies?"

"The new breakfast food." He scrabbles in his brief-case. "Here, take a look at it. I bring it down to get my patents from Bernie, and to consult about marketing it. He is very much interested and wants to start a company with me. We will advertise nationally and over the radio. Reekies will be a big thing."

Herman Hormone fishes out a handful of flakes from his brief-case.

"Go ahead and try a little," he says, all excited and delighted. "Here." He reaches into the case again and comes up with a bowl, a spoon, a bottle of cream and a little package of sugar.

"Try it this way," he insists, putting the crumbs into the bowl and pouring milk and sugar into the mess.

Well, I wish to humor this crackpot, and besides I have a hummock in my stomach from not eating any breakfast

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yet, so I gulp down some of the stuff and play a tune with the spoon for this goon.

It has a very remarkable flavor—quite different from any breakfast food I know. Leafy, like a vegetable, with just a touch of fertilizer.

"How do you like it?" asks Herman Hormone, rubbing his bald noggin and jumping up and down.

I manage to choke the stuff into my system and force a grin to my chin.

"I never taste anything like it in all my life," I declare.

"Do you think I can make a success of this new breakfast food?" he asks.

"They say the public will swallow anything," I tell him.

"Look here," says Herman Hormone, fishing into his brief-case again. "How do you like the package I design?"

He flashes a big box with the Reekies label stamped all over it.

"Why not make the box top bigger?" I suggest.

"Bigger?"

"Sure. Easier to tear off. Every cereal has big box tops. When somebody buys a box they tear off the top and send it in to enter prize contests with."

"A fine idea," Hormone comments. "I will remember it. You are quite a practical man, Mr. Feep."

AT THE moment I do not feel so practical. In fact, I feel a little sick. My stomach is buzzing like a bee-hive during the honey-making season.

But I pile on a smile full of guile.

"Of course I am practical," I tell the inventor. "I know all about marketing, because I play the markets for years. I know all about the things women buy, because I am married three times. Why right now I have women just hounding me to death to handle financial affairs."

I wince when I think of it. But I brush the idea aside and continue with my sales talk.

"Maybe you can use a guy like me to help you on the practical end of this business," I suggest. "Promoting and building up sales and thinking of slogans and such. With your inventions and my intentions we can put Reekies into the stomachs of each and every lummox!"

"Very well," says Herman Hormone. "You can consider yourself as general manager of the Reekies Breakfast Food Company, if you like."

I like very much indeed. All at once I manage to solve my biggest headache—now I will be able to draw a salary and pay up on that alimony.

All I wish now is to solve my biggest stomach-ache, because the strange breakfast food has me in a most peculiar mood. I secretly wonder if anybody will ever eat such rough, tough stuff. My stomach churns and burns. I try to imagine what Herman Hormone must make the flakes out of. Probably he uses a lot of old mattress-stuffing he pulls out of condemned Japanese army cots.

But there is no time to let my mind wander and ponder. Because just then the door opens and out dashes Bernie the Attorney.

His mustache bristles in the breeze when he sees Herman Hormone. He ignores me and pumps the inventor by the hand.

"Ah, here you are!" he booms. "Come right in, my dear fellow—we're all set to go! I'm lining up our radio program right now. Matter of fact, I'm auditioning."

"Auditioning?"

"No matter what kind of a show we put on, everybody knows that break-

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fast foods are really sold by the commercials. And what do you need for commercials? Announcers! And who is the best announcer in the world? J. Selwyn Spellbinder, that's who! So who is auditioning for you right now?"

"What kind of a quiz program is this?" I interrupt. "You ask the questions and give the answers too. How can you lose?"

But nobody notices me. They are hot to go into the private office and listen to this J. Selwyn Spellbinder drool through some sample commercials.

So I follow the leader and head for the private office.

MR. SPELLBINDER turns out to be a fatso in a tuxedo, only his belly sticks out where his tuxedo junction should be. He is full of hair-oil and looks like a well-greased hub-cap.

We sit down, and this yard of lard gets up in the middle of the room and rattles some papers and makes some capers.

"I will read you some sample commercial announcements," he says. "Naturally, we have no copy on Reekies as yet. But these samples will give you some idea of the style of advertising I advise over the air."

Twirling his tonsils, Spellbinder gazes down at an imaginary microphone and croons.

"This program is sponsored by the makers of FOOD, spelled F-O-O-D! Eat FOOD, it's good for you! FOOD, that new taste sensation, is the ideal nourishment for everyone! FOOD is good for men, women, and children! Eat FOOD, for that extra pep and energy you all need. Doctors recommend using FOOD as often as three times a day! Everybody likes FOOD—it will not harm the tiniest infant! Amazing scientific tests show that lack of FOOD is one of the chief causes of starvation! Are you one of the many people who suffer from hunger? Correct your difficulties with FOOD! FOOD is rich in vitamins, and comes in many delicious flavors. The next time you go into a restaurant, order some FOOD. You'll like it! Or better still, why don't you run down to your neighborhood grocer's right away and order some FOOD? Remember the name, folks—FOOD—that important part of everyone's diet. Serve a little FOOD at every meal!"

J. Selwyn Spellbinder mops his brow and pants.

"How do you like it?" he asks. Some style, eh? Would you like to hear another sample?"

"No!" I yell. But it is too late. He whips out another script and he is off.

"Everybody's doing it! Doing what? Why, BREATHING! Yes sir, millions everywhere are finding new satisfaction in that great American pastime of BREATHING. Why not do as your doctor does and breathe a little air every day? BREATHING brings you that rich oxygen content so necessary to a healthy bloodstream—it exercises the lungs—promotes new vigor. You'll be delighted at the thrilling pep life affords to those who make BREATHING a daily habit! BREATHING is a great aid to digestion, too! And yet it's so simple that millions can do it in their sleep! Send for our free booklet today, filled with complete instructions on how to breathe, with full, simple diagrams that will delight young and old. Prominent society leaders everywhere endorse BREATHING. BREATHING carries the Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval. So why not start in right now, folks? Learn to breathe, and soon you'll be saying, with millions of others, 'I just can't live

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without it!' "

Spellbinder is so red in the face when he finishes this that he has to sit down and fan himself.

"There," he pants. "That gives you an idea of how to put across a product with a spot announcement. I will get up a series like that for Reekies and in no time at all everybody will buy them."

"Sounds good," agrees Bernie the Attorney. "Everything you say about food and breathing is true. If you can say as much for Reekies, we're made."

"I agree," squeaks Herman Hormone.

"Very well, we'll sign you up right now," the lawyer says.

"Wait a minute," I interrupt, very abrupt. "You forget the most important thing—the program that goes with the announcements."

"Program?" says Bernie the Attorney. "Who cares?" he sniffs.

"Well, you must have a show that will appeal to the women. Women buy breakfast food, you know. And what do women want to hear? Serials. So why not put on a serial to sell cereal?"

"Okay by me," agrees J. Selwyn Spellbinder. "We have a real tear-jerking soap opera down at the station, just waiting for a sponsor. It is called GLORIA GOOHAMMER—GIRL HOG-BUTCHER."

"Will it really appeal to women?" I inquire. "Does it have lots of divorces and accidents and funerals and death-bed scenes? Do the actors wail and sob and scream?"

"Exactly," says J. Selwyn Spellbinder. "It has everything." He makes a face. "But I guarantee you that if it goes on the air, I will stop breathing."

"Just what we want!" exclaims Bernie the Attorney. "Feep, that is a very right and bright idea."

Little Herman Hormone beams up at me. "Let us go now, Mr. Feep," he suggests. "You and I have a lot of work to do."

WE SEEK the nearest exit and clatter down the stairs. Herman Hormone carries his briefcase full of Reekies and I carry my stomach full of same.

Only I do not seem to be carrying it so well. As a matter of fact, I feel a little dizzy going downstairs. My legs ache and my head feels heavy. Something like a bad morning after—but I do not have any night before. It is vexing and perplexing.

However, I figure I need a little fresh air and so I huff and puff along the street.

Herman Hormone trudges along, using his lung and tongue to describe how we will set up a factory to turn out Reekies and so forth.

Me, I am still weak in the physique. I feel my forehead. The skin is rough and scaly.

"What's the matter?" asks Herman Hormone. "You look a little queer."

"I feel funny," I answer. "But not like laughing."

I get out my handkerchief to wipe my forehead. It is difficult for me to move my arms or bend them. But I wipe my forehead because I am sweating—and then I look down at my handkerchief and see—

"Sawdust!" gasps the little inventor. "You are sweating sawdust!"

I stare at it. Yes, little flakes of sawdust trickle from my brow! I am so staggered that I stagger, and reach out to grab hold of an iron fense rail to keep my feet. My finger is scraped and begins to bleed.

One look at my finger is enough. I am not bleeding red blood—but something mean and green!

"Chlorophyl," whispers Herman

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Hormone. "It's chlorophyl."

"Like trees?" I whisper.

"Yes, like trees," breathes Hormone.

I stand there, feeling like a sap, and looking at the sap that flows out of my hand. My fingers are stiff, numb.

"It can't be," I mutter. I try to raise my hand. It jerks up very stiffly, but I manage to grab my hat and take it off to cool my head.

"Youoooffff!!!" Herman Hormone remarks, in a slight scream.

"Now what?" I wail.

"Your hair—it's green and stringy—like vines!"

Hormone stares at me with bulging eyes. "What can it be?" he pants. "Something you inherit from a branch of your family?"

"No vines in my branches," I tell him.

But Herman Hormone thinks otherwise. He stares at me as I stand there, stiff as a board. Others notice my peculiar condition, too.

A bird comes sailing around my head. A dog moseys up and begins to sniff at my feet.

"Take me to a doctor!" I yell, trying to beat off the bird and kick the dog with wooden arms and feet.

"What doctor?" asks Hormone.

"Better make it a tree surgeon!" I gulp.

To make it so you can take it, I am suffering from a bad case of stiff limbs. I am afraid I am going to blossom right there in the street. I feel aged in the wood.

All I can do is lumber along.

AS HORMONE guides me down the sidewalk, I bump into a guy accidentally. The guy turns to me and growls, "Where do you think you're going, bud?"

Then he screams.

Because I *do* bud. Buds spring out of my ears.

"Something in the Reekies," Herman Hormone wails, pulling me away and trying not to look at me. "Something must cause a change in your system! You eat it and you turn into a—"

"Don't say it," I beg him. "Get me to the doctor, quick!"

Finally Herman Hormone guides me up the stairs to the office of a tree surgeon.

This branch-butcher doesn't need to take a second look at me to tell what the matter is. As a matter of fact, he refuses to take a second look. One glimpse is enough, and he hides his face in his hands and moans.

I make a pass at a looking glass and understand. I am a pretty weird specimen. My hair is green, and my skin seems to be covered with scales or bark. My arms and legs are stiff and little buds are shooting out from my ears, from under my sleeves, and at the bottom of my trouser legs. I look like a cross betwen a bad tree and a good camouflage job.

My stomach is heavy, my head is light, and I am losing all feeling. Except for a sort of pulsing inside—which must be the sap coagulating in my veins.

"Come on, Doc, do your stuff," urges Herman Hormone. "My friend here is in need of attention."

"Take him away and plant him," groans the Doc.

"I'm not dead," I rasp. "But I will be unless you do something."

"What can I do?" says the Doc, looking away from me and trembling. "Do you want me to comb the bird's nests out of your hair? How can I help you? I think I'm going mad. This is the first time I ever see such a thing."

"But there must be something you can do," I yell. "Don't leave me out on

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a limb."

"I'd like to saw off your limbs," says the Doc. "To think that I should ever hear a tree bark!"

"I'm not a tree," I tell him. "I'm a man who is turning into a tree."

"When does this condition begin?" asks the Doc, in a quavering voice. "I suppose you start out as a little shaver?"

"Not at all," I inform him. "Kindly do not cast any aspersions on my family tree! All this starts about an hour ago."

I TELL him the story and Herman Hormone nods. At last the tree surgeon is convinced.

"It must be a case of hamadryadism," he says.

"Which?"

"Hamadryadism," he insists, sticking to his story. "A hamadryad, in ancient legend, is a tree-spirit, or a human being imprisoned in a tree. Usually it is the result of a supernatural occurrence."

"Super or natural," I rave, "do something for me!"

"What can I do?" shrugs the Doc. "I am just a tree-surgeon."

"Prune me," I suggest. "Get these buds and twigs off me. And remove the bark from my skin. I do not wish to be a walking caterpillar cafeteria."

"It may hurt," the Doc warns me.

It may and it does, but I grin and bear it as he stretches me out on the table and chops away at the buds and vines. Then he sandpapers my skin and removes the bark with a plane. By this time I am stiffer than ever, and I cannot feel the sandpaper or planing job at all.

"There," sighs the Doc. "That's that."

"But I'm still stiff," I object. "I feel more wooden than ever. What can I do to change?"

The Doc shrugs again. "I don't know," he sighs. "Speaking as a tree surgeon, I must admit the problem stumps me."

I pay him off with money I borrow from Herman Hormone.

"All you can do is go home and go to bed," the Doc tells me. "Maybe it will wear off in time."

Herman Hormone and I take our leave. Hormone has to carry me home, I am so rigid. And when I get there he leaves me, sighing and shrugging and promising to analyze the Reekies and see if he can discover some clue as to what makes the change and what can help me out of my fix.

There is nothing left for me to do but follow the tree surgeon's advice and go to bed.

I do.

I sleep like a log.

The next thing I know, I hear a banging and a thumping and a pounding outside my room. I open my eyes and somebody opens my door. Rather violently—with an axe.

The axe smashes through the panel, followed by the hatchet face of my ex-wife, Joyce.

"There he is, girls!" she squeals. She rushes through the opening, and I see that Gloria and Aileen are right behind her.

My three ex-wives give me a stare and a glare.

"Here it is tomorrow!" Gloria reminds me, in a mild tone of yell. "Where is our alimony?"

I do not answer. I merely keep a very wooden face.

It is not hard for me to do so—because when I try to move, I suddenly discover that I can't! I am stiff and solid—solid wood!

The tree surgeon removes my buds and bark, but that does not halt the

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process which goes on in my sleep. Now I am a wooden man—and with a slight amount of horror I realize I cannot stir a bit. .

The three alimony moaners stand over my bed and shriek at me.

"Get up out of bed, you lazy goon!" suggests Aileen.

"He's too drunk to move," Gloria guesses.

"He's positively stiff!" Joyce sneers.

She reaches out a finger and touches my cheek. "Eeeek!" she complains. "He *is* stiff! Maybe he's dead."

AILEEN reaches into her purse and pulls out a little bottle of whiskey. She waves it in front of my nose.

"Yes," she shudders. "He's dead all right, if he doesn't make a grab for that."

"Wait a minute." Gloria runs her hand along my shoulder. "Wait a minute, girls. This isn't Lefty."

"No?"

"No—it's just a dummy."

"How do you tell the difference?" Aileen wants to know.

"Really," Gloria insists. "This is a dummy made up to look like Lefty." She taps my chin. "See, it's wood!"

"Just a chip off the old block, eh?" Aileen remarks.

"The dirty dog," says Gloria. "He must skip town when he can't pay us our alimony, and leave this dummy for a decoy to fool us."

"A vile trick," Aileen declares. She raises the axe. "I'm going to chop this dizzy-looking dummy to splinters. At least we'll have some kindling to split up for our furnaces, girls."

It looks like I'm going to have a hot time in a little while. But I cannot move to avoid the axe, and I must lie there and listen. This talk about chopping me up gives me a splitting headache, too.

Aileen swings the axe. This is it. But—

"Hold it!" Gloria yells. "I've an idea! Why ruin a perfectly good dummy?"

"What's good about it?" demands Joyce. "It looks like Feep."

"Even so, a dummy is a dummy. Why can't we sell it to a department store? They ought to pay something for clothing dummies. We can split up the dough and at least get something for our troubles breaking in here."

"Why not?" Aileen lowers the axe. "Grab hold of it and we'll carry the dummy out to the car."

I lie there. I would like to quake with horror, but I cannot make with a shake. I would like to yell like hell, also, but I cannot talk or squawk. It is frightful, and far from delightful.

Just as the girls are about to grab me, I hear footsteps on the stairs. At least I can still hear, and what I hear makes me hope.

But the footsteps turn out to belong to J. Selwyn Spellbinder and Bernie the Attorney. They stick their necks through the hole in the door.

"Pardon me," says Bernie, "but we are looking for Lefty Feep."

"You and the sheriff," snaps Aileen. "We want him too. But the big lug skips town on us and leaves a dummy as a decoy."

"Dummy?" asks J. Selwyn Spellbinder. "What dummy?"

"This one here," says Aileen. "We are going to take it and sell it to a department store."

Spellbinder gazes at me. Then he claps his hands together.

"I've got it!" he shouts.

"What?" gasps Bernie the Attorney.

"I tell you, I've got it!"

"Well, get rid of it if it makes you holler so," Bernie advises him.

"Wait until you hear this," says

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Spellbinder. "I've got a terrific idea for our Reekies show."

"We already have a show," Bernie reminds him. "A serial program."

"Nuts to the serial! Grape nuts to it!" says Spellbinder. "Listen to this! A serial show appeals only to women. Why not a show that will appeal to everyone? I mean a comedy program."

"Comedy program?"

"Certainly—like Bergen and McCarthy, for instance. Take a look at that dummy. What a character! It's much goofier looking than Charlie McCarthy. I'll go on the air in a ventriloquist act with this life-sized dummy. We'll change our opening program, build it around this act, play it up big! We can hold a big banquet for the opening, with lots of ballyhoo. We'll cram Reekies down the throat of the nation."

BERNIE the Attorney catches some of the enthusiasm. I just lie there and catch the dirty digs.

"You know radio, Spellbinder," he says. "If you say that's the thing to do, we'd better do it." He turns to the women. "How much do you want for this dummy?" he asks.

"$100 in cash," pipes Gloria.

"Don't be silly, we can get more than that," whispers Joyce.

"I doubt it—the thing is too silly-looking," Gloria says.

I wince.

Bernie the Attorney beams. "Sold!" he says. He pulls out a handful of bills and the girls get busy fondling the currency.

"Come on," says Spellbinder. "We have no time. First show is scheduled for tomorrow night. I'll have to bat out a script and rehearse. You know, I always figure I want to be a radio comedian."

They grab me and tote me down the stairs. I am helpless. The ideas these people have fairly makes the sap run cold in my veins.

I will not bark a remark about what happens when I get to the broadcasting station. I am propped up against the wall while Spellbinder and a bunch of continuity writers go into a muddle and huddle and grind out some comedy dialogue between a ventriloquist and a dummy. Then Spellbinder holds a rehearsal with me on his lap.

I cannot say a word—except for the awful stuff Spellbinder's ventriloquism puts into my mouth. He rehearses and curses and I just give him my wooden stare.

It is late at night before the practising is over. Spellbinder puts me down and gets ready to leave. Bernie the Attorney comes in to pick him up and check over last-minute plans for the show.

"How's the Reekies manufacturing going?" asks Spellbinder.

"I don't know," says Bernie. "I do not see Herman Hormone all day. And Feep skips town. But Hormone must be busy."

Hormone is busy.

As a matter of fact he is busy coming through the door right now. And he is still busier staring at me.

"Lefty Feep!" he screams.

Bernie turns and laughs.

"No," he tells Hormone. "This is just a dummy of Feep."

Herman Hormone comes over and touches me with a shaking finger.

"No," he says. "This is no dummy. This is Lefty Feep."

"Why it's n o t h i n g but wood," chuckles Spellbinder.

"You are mistaken." Herman Hormone sighs. "It is Lefty Feep. He turns to wood after eating the Reekies."

"No—you're crazy!"

"Look at this." Herman Hormone

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fumbles in his bulging briefcase and pulls out something. It is a wooden dog.

"I have a pet dog," he says. "Last night I feed it some Reekies. Today I have a wooden toy."

"But why—how—?"

HERMAN HORMONE explains everything. He tells what happens to me yesterday. The two high-pressure artists listen and gape.

"Last night I go home and experiment," Hormone tells them. "I find that the vegetable substances I make my Reekies out of cause a strange reaction on the system of any form of animal life. Anyone who absorbs Reekies assumes the characteristics of vegetable life—particularly of trees. Feep eats Reekies and turns to wood. So does the dog. That proves something."

"Maybe it proves Feep is a dog," says Bernie, unkindly.

"I always figure only God can make a tree," adds Spellbinder.

"Reekies can make a tree," Hormone insists. "I swear to you this is not a dummy but Lefty Feep."

Bernie the Attorney looks at me and shrugs. "Well," he mutters, "he can't talk or move. No harm in him. We'll just go ahead as we plan, put the program on and forget about it."

He smiles. "Of course you must go to work and change that Reekies formula again before the show tomorrow. Otherwise everybody will turn to wood from eating Reekies. Not that I mind that, either—but wooden people won't buy a second package."

He laughs. Herman Hormone stares at him. I stand there, feeling like an overgrown toothpick.

"You don't mean it!" wails the inventor. "You can't be so cold-blooded. This is a man—we must help him to get out of this terrible situation somehow! And I certainly can't revise my Reekies and invent a new breakfast food in just one night."

"Listen," says Bernie the Attorney, chewing on a cigar. "You're doing what I say. I have a contract with your signature on it. Get busy and keep your mouth shut."

Spellbinder nods and looks very smug. Little Herman Hormone knows he can expect no sympathy from him.

"I—I won't do it," he says, sticking out his chin. "It's too inhuman."

"Oh yes you will," chuckles Bernie. "Because if you don't, I will tell the police you feed breakfast food to Lefty Feep and turn him to wood. That's murder."

Hormone steps back in horror. The two men nod at him and wink.

"Obey me or fry," Bernie tells him. He scowls at my wooden face. "As for you, Feep—if you can still hear me—you'd better behave too. Or I'm liable to turn some woodpeckers loose on your face."

"We'll kick his slats for him," grins Spellbinder.

"We'll set him up as a cigar-store Indian!" Bernie guffaws. "But Feep will behave, I'm sure. And so will Herman, here. And nobody will ever know."

"Knock on wood," laughs Spellbinder, hitting me on the head.

"Uh—er—" Hormone gulps.

"What is it?"

"I would like to take Lefty home with me," suggests the little inventor. "Maybe if I study his condition I can hit on a clue in changing the Reekies formula."

"All right," says Bernie the Attorney. "But no funny business—or you're up for murder."

Hormone is almost down for the count when he hears this. But he picks up my wooden body in trembling hands and lugs me out to a car.

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We drive home.

"Can you hear me, Lefty?" Hormone wails. I cannot answer him. He just looks at me and shakes. I wish I could.

"This is an awful spot," he sighs. "I will never forgive myself for this. How can I get you out of this mess? And how can I get myself out of it?

"I do not tell Bernie the Attorney that almost all our money is being spent right now—I have a batch of Reekies waiting to be put in boxes that will cost us at least $50,000.

"So if I change the formula tonight and throw the stuff away, we are broke. And they will kill me when they hear about it tomorrow."

I wish I could help him. I wish I could help myself. But I just sit there like the dummy I am until we arrive at Herman Hormone's hangout.

HE LIVES in a big house with a long shed in the back yard. He carries my stiff body out to the shed and we enter a big open space. Set along the walls are a lot of machines—for mixing and sifting and sorting. Piles of Reekies boxes are lying next to conveyor belts. Big vats in the center of the room are filled with breakfast food flakes.

"Here is where I manufacture the Reekies," he says. "The workers will be here tomorrow ready to box and ship to the wholesalers who place orders already. Now what can I do?"

His bald head looks like Niagara Falls as he sweats.

"I can check and re-check my formula," he sighs. "But I know I cannot isolate one element that makes people turn to wood. The whole batch is no good, that's all. My money is lost and we are ruined. I have 200,000 boxes to fill with Reekies and no Reekies to put into them."

He paces the floor. "And that isn't the worst," he sighs. "It is what I do to you that hurts. Changing you into wood! If there is only some way—"

Herman Hormone approaches me and touches my head. "No use," he says. "You're wooden from head to toe. An overgrown clothespin. No—wait—"

He grabs my wrist. I can't feel anything, but he can.

"Your heart," he gasps. "Your heart is still beating! That means you must be alive. Alive, but with a wooden shell. You are not completely wood fiber. The Reekies must act like the erratic chromosone agent that turns some people to stone. Petrification, calcification, ossification—only in your case, it's woodenification!"

He grabs me and picks me up.

"Maybe this will work," he gasps. He carries me to one of the big metal vats. It is empty. He dumps me inside.

"I will soften up the pulp that covers you, if I can," he says. He turns a spigot on the side of the vat and hot water starts to bubble into it. Soon I am swirling around in a steam bath. I float like a celluloid duck.

"Look!" he murmurs. "The outer layers of vegetable fiber are peeling off."

Sure enough, I see slivers falling away from my body. My eyes are clouded with steam. And all at once, I can move!

My movements are stiff, but I actually feel blood circulating in my veins! I try to speak. I can't, yet.

But a minute later I feel the boiling water, and I open my mouth and let out a yowl, and then I break the world's record for a broad jump as I dive out of the vat.

"Feep—you're alive!" shouts Herman Hormone.

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"Boiled alive!" I howl.

TO MAKE a long story short, in a few minutes I am absolutely normal once more, except for a few blisters where the water burns me.

"Saved," Hormone sobs. "I am so happy I am not a murderer."

I put on one of his old suits and pat him on the back.

"Hormone," I say, "I like you. You are more interested in saving me than you are in your investment—even though those crooks are out to ruin you."

He looks grim. "That is right," he admits. "I still lose all this money on Reekies. I cannot buy stuff for a new formula, even if I prepare it tonight. There is no dough to make new cereal."

I grin.

"Am I still your general manager?" I ask.

"Yes—why?"

"Then I will save you. I have an idea that will make our fortune—and fix Bernie the Attorney and J. Selwyn Spellbinder for good. If you promise to do exactly what I say, I'll take charge."

"You're the boss," says Herman Hormone, holding out his hand.

Then I tell him what I plan, and we get busy.

We work all night. When the employees come to the factory shed the next day, we make them hustle. By the time it is ready to show up at the broadcasting studio for the first program, we are all set.

Herman Hormone goes in alone, just as we plan it out. Everybody is ready for the show. In a private office, Bernie the Attorney and J. Selwyn Spellbinder are celebrating. The setup is perfect.

To make everything complete, they invite my three ex-wives to the performance. Aileen and Joyce and Gloria are there ready to see their wooden dummy of a husband perform a ventriloquist act.

As Hormone enters, Bernie is just telling my heartless spouses how it is really me that turns to wood and is mistaken for a dummy.

"Ha, that's good!" cackles Aileen. "You mean we actually sell Lefty for that hundred bucks? I know we will get some dough out of his worthless carcass some day! Now I will get a real laugh out of the show." Everybody chuckles.

"Ahem," says Herman Hormone.

"Ah, there you are. Do you succeed in changing the Reekies formula?" asks Spellbinder.

"Yes. I bring some for this banquet," Herman Hormone announces.

Bernie the Attorney sniffs at the package suspiciously. "No tricks now," he says. "You don't bring us anything that will change *us* into wood," he snarls.

"How can you think of such a thing?" asks Hormone, with an innocent smile. "It would spoil the program, wouldn't it?"

"Well, let's have some," says Spellbinder. "We are celebrating with these charming ladies, after all—and we might as well sample our new product. I hope the new Reekies are better than the old ones."

"See for yourself," Hormone suggests.

Everybody eats a bowl of Reekies with milk and sugar.

Bernie the Attorney grunts. "Tastes like dried leaves," he complains. "We'll have to work to dump this junk on the public. Say—by the way—where's our dummy? Where is Lefty Feep, that wooden-headed termite's delight?"

"Here I am," I say, walking into the office.

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There are howls and scowls.

I grin through the din.

"What happens? How come you are not aged in the wood?" they shout.

"Yeah, and what happens to our program—who will be the ventriloquist's dummy?" squawks J. Selwyn Spellbinder.

"You will," I tell him.

"What the—?"

"You just eat a bowl of the old Reekies," I inform the mob. "Double strength, too. I have Hormone mix up an extra-severe batch of it. You should be turning to wood much faster than I do. In fact, you should be wood right now, but good."

TO THEIR horror, they find that what I say is true. My ex-wives feel themselves becoming numb. Aileen's hair is green. Joyce has a bud on her neck. Gloria looks like a factory throwout from a sawmill. Bernie the Attorney has a face like a cigar box.

Spellbinder tries to get up and tackle me, but his legs are too stiff to carry him.

They sit there and gawk instead of talk.

"Yes, you are wood," I repeat. "And you will stay wood for several days. I find out the secret of recovery. And if you all behave, I will release you in due time."

"But this is treachery!" gasps Bernie.

"Call it tree-son," I grin. "Because that's what you will be in a few minutes—a tree, son. So just relax and save what's left of your voice."

"We go on the air in a little while. I will do the announcing and carry on with Spellbinder's part. Spellbinder will be *my* dummy in the comedy act."

"But—"

Bernie's complaint comes from far away. His voice is going fast. "But, what happens? You can't sell Reekies that turn people to wood."

"Of course not. We change the material we make Reekies out of. I think of something sensational last night after I recover. I guarantee people will eat this stuff up. But wait—you'll hear about it on the program in a little while."

And that is just what they do. We carry the wooden wives and the two leafy gentlemen out to the studio. They sit there and listen with budding curiosity—as they bud all over the place.

I step up to the microphone with my dummy and read the script. Then I launch into my commercial announcement.

"Remember, folks—this program is sponsored by the makers of Reekies . . . Reekies, that amazing new breakfast food! The breakfast food to end all breakfast foods!

"Friends, why do you eat breakfast food? Why, for bulk and roughage, of course. And what has more bulk and roughage than the average breakfast food? Why—the boxes out of which breakfast food is made! Reekies is the first breakfast food made entirely out of breakfast food boxes! Good nourishing cardboard has plenty of bulk and roughage! Remember to buy Reekies, folks—Reekies, made from ground-up breakfast food boxes. It's the new taste sensation of the nation."

That ends the first program, and it of course explains what I do. In order to save Hormone the money it costs to manufacture an entirely new product, I merely advise him to grind up the 200,000 cardboard boxes. They taste as good as most breakfast food does, and I figure they are just as nourishing.

Funny thing, the public thinks so too. After that first program they buy like mad.

In a few days I give Spellbinder,

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Bernie, and the three women a good hot bath and they come out all right. But from this time on, I am the boss.

My wives never bother me for alimony. Bernie and Spellbinder dare not squawk because they are making too much money on the new Reekies.

Herman Hormone is happy.

So am I. But I do not eat breakfast food any more.

LEFTY FEEP grinned at me.

"You are done with your story?" I asked.

He nodded.

"Well, I'm not done with you," I told him. "To begin with, the whole idea of your breakfast food is more than I can swallow. You say you changed to wood and back again. Maybe. And you say you decided to make your breakfast food out of the cardboard boxes it came in. Well, I'll stand for all that. But there is one thing you did not and cannot explain."

"What is that?" asked Lefty Feep.

"If you used all the boxes to make breakfast food out of," I purred, "then will you kindly tell me what you used for boxes to put the breakfast food into?"

"Very simple," said Mr. Lefty Feep. "A breakfast food box must be solid and durable. So I merely suggest to Herman Hormone that he make them out of all his old Reekies."

"Then you—?"

"Exactly." Feep smiled. "We make our breakfast food out of the boxes. And we make our boxes out of pressed breakfast food!"

THE END

CALL A DOCTOR!

By R. CLAYTON

PROGRESS is a wonderful thing, we say. Take a look at our modern doctors' offices, for example, filled with patients all waiting to be relieved of pain and discomfort. In the operating rooms medical men and women in white are provided with all the safeguards and discoveries of surgery—the merciful anesthetic, the marvel of antiseptic, the miracle of shining instruments fitted to deft hands. All of these are familiar sights. They are identified with our modern improved age. But are they new?

Let us look into the past, back three thousand years ago—about the fourteenth century before the beginning of the Christian calendar. Amenhotep III, greatest of the Pharaohs, reigned over all of Egypt. The capital of the nation, Thebes, had the aspect of power and beauty. Amenhotep III used his power to construct glorious temples, huge towers of stone, and superb public buildings. All were covered with luxurious carvings and paintings. Between Luxor and the temple of Karnak there stretched a lovely tropical garden for 1½ miles. The palace was radiant with its many colors. Nearby lay a huge artificial lake on which the royal barge could sail on state occasions bathed in color and music. Into the harbor of Thebes sailed the Phoenician galleys laden with the riches of the world, exquisite furniture of carved ivory and ebony, bronze armor, gold, grain, and slaves. Do you suppose that in the midst of all this culture, luxury, and learning, it was possible for the science of medicine to be unknown?

On the papyrus scrolls discovered deep in the tombs of the Ancients are scrawled the records of Egypt and her twin sciences, medicine and surgery. Though the documents are yellowed and dry now, through the centuries they have remained readable. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, during the great period of archaeological discovery, they were made known to today's world. From these tattered documents we learn that the problems of the average Egyptian were virtually the same in his relationship with the medical profession.

There was great complaint in those days about specialization. Egyptians bemoaned the fact that the old-fashioned, all-around family physician was a thing of the past now that men concentrated on learning all they could about only one certain part of the body. Does that complaint sound familiar? Herodotus, the famous Greek historian, wrote in his second book of *Histories:*

"The practice of medicine is so divided among

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them that each physician is a healer of one disease and no more. All the country is full of physicians, some of the eye, some of the teeth, some of what pertains to the belly, and some of the hidden diseases."

Many times when specialists were called in to participate in a consultation they disagreed, as some of our physicians are apt to do today. Their disagreement often resulted in loud and lusty argumentation, and on one very pathetic funeral inscription one can find letters which translated state, "I died of doctor-tumult."

The same remedies employed by modern medicine were known and in use in those ancient days. Goiter was treated with burnt sponge. Only recently has science discovered why. Analysis shows that the ashes of a sponge contain a substantial amount of iodine, the same drug that is used today in goiter prevention.

Arthritis and related pains were treated by tooth extractions then as they are now. Pasteur's supposed discovery that smallpox could be prevented with a serum injection made from the pus of a diseased animal was also being used by the Egyptians many thousands of years before the birth of Christ. By some miracle the people of the East must have guessed how to combat an epidemic; in the face of one they inoculated themselves by taking a little pus from a smallpox sore and rubbing it into a small scratch on the arm.

The Egyptian physician made full use of laxatives among his patients; he recommended the chewing of the berries of the castor-oil tree.

All the diseases that we are now plagued with and are prone to blame on the hectic pace of modern living,—the so-called degenerative diseases, existed in the Egyptian hey-day, too. Post mortems on mummies have revealed traces of gallstones, Bright's disease, and arteriosclerosis.

Let us compare the Egyptian scene with that of the Greeks, 1900 years later. These were golden days for Greece. Culture reigned supreme in Athens. Phidian was at work on the sculpture for the Parthenon; Aristophanes was laboring over his comedies; Aeschylus had just completed the *Orestes* trilogy.

Hippocrates, the famous 5th century (B.C.) physician, is hard at work. It is the Hippocratic Oath that medical men down to our present day take before launching on their careers. The principles that Hippocrates preached will sound familiar.

His own words, "A physician must learn to be a good judge of human nature . . ." indicate that he firmly believed that the patient should be put at ease and encouraged to talk about himself. In forty case histories that Hippocrates has outlined in detail we learn that before a diagnosis was made, he checked to find out how well the patient slept, whether he was troubled by headaches or constipation, whether his tongue was coated.

Modern physicians follow the same procedure letter by letter. Hippocrates observed a sick man's tongue, his hollow eyes, sunken temples, flushed cheeks, and racking cough. He listened to the patient's back and chest for fluid in the lungs. The modification of this same method in use today is called "Hippocratic Succussion" after its founder. Hippocrates diagnosed his patient's condition as a "wasting disease" and recommended fresh air, rest, and good food. Hippocrates and physicians of today arrive at identical conclusions. The man was suffering from tuberculosis and would be treated in the 20th century with fresh air, rest, and good food.

Sanatoriums were in use in those days, and many doctors sent their patients to Epidaurus, the Greek version of our modern health farm. The stronger patients joined the gym classes to do exercises, or if they did not feel up to it, basking in the warm sunlight and bathing in spring waters were the other diversions offered.

Inscriptions have come to light which clearly relate the details of operations which took place in the days of the Greeks. The surgeon of those days was surprisingly well-equipped. He had a special room to operate in which was fitted with the proper lighting. He made use of a medical library, a laboratory with basins and cabinets of instruments, sponges, and bandages. Bronze forceps were unearthed which lead us to believe that the Greek doctor was able to perform Caesarian operations.

Physicians of those days were well schooled in anatomy; they had learned their surgical techniques from human dissections just as our students of today are learning. The Greek doctor knew ligatures and tied off arteries to prevent loss of blood while he was operating. The incision was sewed up with a needle and thread.

To all of us these facts may prove unusual, and in many cases hinge on the unbelievable. We are suffering under the delusion that everything in practice now is a new discovery. To be most accurate we must claim them to be rediscoveries —for in the darkened corner of our municipal museum, or in the stony depths of an Egyptian tomb lies the answer to many a medical problem.

* * *

COMING NEXT ISSUE

MINIONS OF THE TIGER by CHESTER S. GEIER

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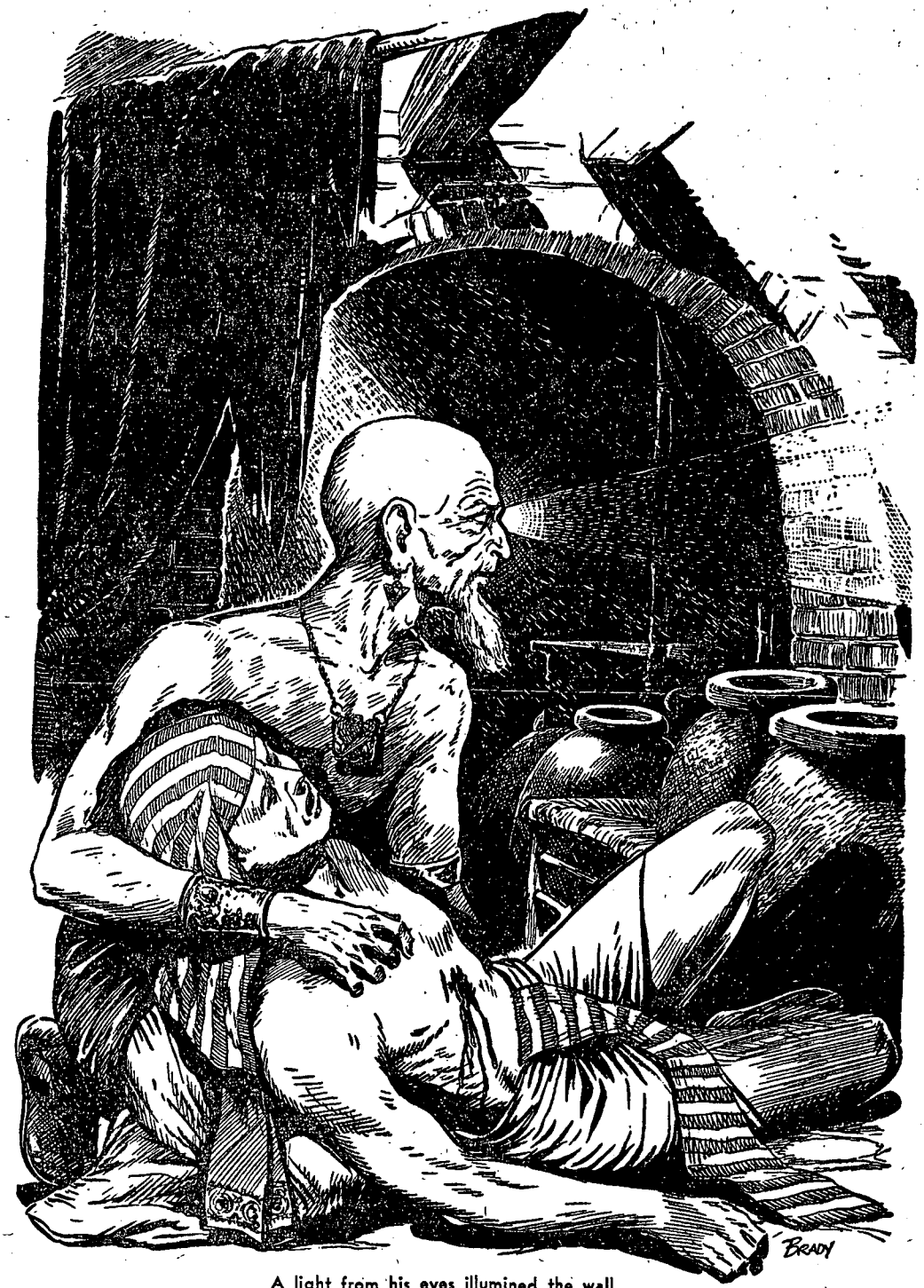
In ancient Egypt he died, but even as Death claimed him, he saw a vision of the tomorrow that would be his



A light from his eyes illumined the wall . . .

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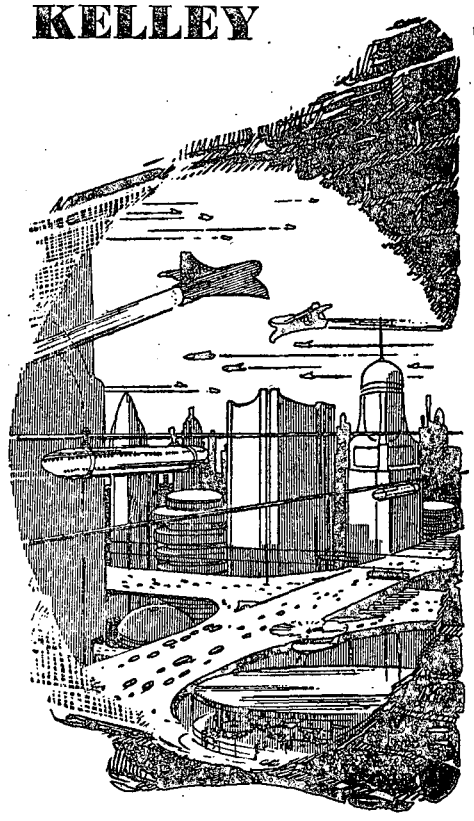
He Who Saw Tomorrow

By THOMAS P. KELLEY



THE descending sun cast fading flares, that long-gone day, on a little, half-primitive village, somewhere far down the Nile.

It was the hour of prayer throughout the land of old Egypt, as the great river, sparkling in the departing rays of Ra, flowed its majestic course. From somewhere in midstream a hippopotamus raised a massive head, to gaze at the score or so of man-made structures, spurt water from its nostrils then submerge as a cloud of birds flew, screeching, overhead. A lone crane stood, one leg uplifted, upon those age-old banks; while in the distance an ibis spread its yellow-striped tail, to rise into the air in graceful flight.

Three hundred miles to the north the people of the capital city were in the throes of a long-deferred rejoicing; for upon that historic day the great pyramid had at long last been completed; it was whispered the mighty pharoah, Cheops himself, was smiling; the many temples closed during the construction of his monument were to be reopened while the thousands of toilers, who had known some twenty years of grueling labor, would now be permitted to return to the tilling of the soil and their various, former duties.

But in the little village, far from the capital city, there was only the usual calm and quiet of sundown. And as our story begins there, in imagination let us enter one of its small, mud-built dwellings, somewhat apart from the others and close upon the banks of the Nile.

Within the one-room structure, upon a sleeping mat, a young man lay in a half-sitting posture, supported in the arms of one much older. Both dressed in the raiment of ancient Egypt, one might have sensed the nearby presence of death in the semi-gloom of the room; a presence that had tangible affirmation in the gory wound on the younger man's breast, which was slowly welling the life blood from him. It was the latter who was speaking in a weak, tired voice.

"There is really no pain—no great pain, Karamus." But the agony that apparently racked his frame seemed to belie the words.

"And you knew it would happen.

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You knew it many moons ago!" There was awe in the voice of the other.

The younger man nodded. "True. But who am I to change fate, even if I were so able? As for death, it is nothing. I will know it many times down through the ages, till that far distant day when my Ivis will again stand before me." He spoke with calm resignation. "But it is worth waiting for. I am content."

A long silence followed, the approaching shades of dusk ever darkening the little room. Finally the younger man turned anxious eyes to the other.

"You will keep my secret, Karamus? By the Hawks of Horus, by the Gods of Egypt you swear it?"

"Need you ask, Sakura? Have I betrayed you in the past? And even if I were to do so, who would believe me? What would be my own fate?"

A wan smile played at the corner of Sakura's mouth. "Forgive me, old friend." His hand sought and found the other's. "Of course you won't; I should have known better than ask it. But the Princess," he went on. "Has any new word of her reached you?"

"She is as when last you saw her," answered Karamus. "She is as she will always be in this life."

"And her hair?"

"White. As white as it was on that dawn when she ran, wild-eyed and screaming, up the valley. As white as it sometimes appears in those wonderful scenes your mind has shown me of distant days when she shall live again."

ONCE more a smile on the lips of Sakura the Egyptian, even though blood continually welled from the wound on his breast and the nearness of death was apparent. He brushed aside the other's attempt to give assistance.

"No; it is useless. We cannot hold the hands of fate nor change what is destined to be. And yet I would again look upon my Ivis before the darkness claims me. Come; raise me higher that I may see once more what I will one day know again."

There was an anxiety in the other's voice.

"But are you certain, Sakura? Are you sure you will possess your unearthly power in the future lives you are destined to know?"

"Of course. There can be no doubt about it. I have explained it to you many times. Always it will be given to me, in each existence, as I approach manhood. But hasten. Raise me higher. My time in this life is almost spent."

The darkness had steadily been increasing within the little room till objects were dimly discernible. Only faintly could one have made out the two speakers. And then in the next minute the gloom was suddenly brightened—brightened in a manner which, while most familiar to moderns of the twentieth century, would have caused the subjects of Cheops to flee from the small dwelling with screams of terror.

It was a pale, phosphorescent-like glow that seemed to suddenly spring from the eyes of Sakura the Egyptian, and shoot through the gloom of the room to the far wall. A glow similar in appearance to that which emits from the projection booth to the screen, in any darkened cinema today. And then upon that crude wall appeared a rapid series of pictures, clear and life-like as a modern news reel, showing numerous scenes of a great city and its occupants in the throes and hurry of everyday life.

But what a city!

A city such as the eyes of today could see only in the most fantastic

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paintings and drawings of our artists, depicting distant tomorrows. A city whose colossal buildings, seemingly countless and of weird architectural design, rose to such incredible heights they seemed to brush the very sky—stretching away to be lost to sight in all directions. A gigantic city of lofty landing towers, crossed and recrossed by thousands of elevated thoroughfares, hundreds of feet above glass enclosed pavements below.

And along the higher thoroughfares as well as the ones below, the millions were swarming; while shooting across the heavens were the countless black and rocket-like outlines of large and smaller flying ships—some coming to rest on the lofty landing towers.

A gasp escaped the lips of Karamus.

"Gods of the Ancients—what a city!" he exclaimed. "Even though you have shown it to me many times in the past, it never ceases to be nought but a wonder. And to think that this world will one day know such cities, while humans fly through the air, many times faster than the swiftest bird!"

The other nodded.

"But let us again see Ivis, as I will one day know her," he answered, his voice becoming ever fainter.

With the rapidity of thought, a scene was suddenly flashed upon the wall. A scene that showed, as might a movie close-up, a young man and young girl, who stood upon a small balcony, dressed in strange, tight-fitting garments; smiling and with eyes only for each other. Distantly behind them were the towering outlines of great structures. As the two in the small room watched, the arms of the man went out and around the girl, a strikingly beautiful girl, who smiled in the manner that needs no interpretation. And their lips met in a long, long kiss.

Karamus nodded.

"It is Ivis. Ah how well I remember her, Sakura. And as beautiful as she was on the day the soldiers came from the capital city to destroy her. A curse to the Princess of Egypt!" he added. "It was she who brought it about! Ivis would still be alive if it were not for—"

"Desist," came faintly from Sakura. "Too late now, old friend, to think of the past. It is only the future that matters. Only the future. We had our revenge, a wonderful revenge. And the day will come, when I shall have another. But—but—"

Sakura, the Egyptian, sank back into the arms of the other. At the same instant the picture on the wall disappeared, the weird glow vanished and the little room was plunged into an almost Stygian gloom. An hour passed, another followed, with only the ever-weakening breathing of the dying man to denote a semblance of life remained to him. The moon rose to sail across the sky, the stars came out to gleam and twinkle. Then a final tremor shook his body and breathing ceased. The other began a low, mournful incantation.

Without, in the soft lunar rays, the Nile flowed on as liquid silver. Faintly from somewhere came the lonely cry of a far-off night bird.

THREE thousand years later:

The glorious Asmonaean Princess was g l a r i n g into the crystal-clear waters of the sunken pool which graced her lavish quarters, her dark eyes wide in horror. Bright sun rays, streaming into the room, but gave added proof that what her eyes beheld was no dream. One slender arm half rose in an aimless gesture; with an effort she withheld the scream that sought to escape her. No! She must not scream. She dare not!

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With a little sob the regal beauty staggered to her feet, in the manner of one who has received a death wound. In the morning light her filmy sleeping robe revealed her shapely body—the same lithe body that but three years before had aroused unholy desires in Herod Antipas with the barbaric dance that doomed the Baptist, as her long, wavy black hair whirled around her.

But now that hair was no longer black, it was white—as white as the snow on distant mountain tops, far to the north. Upon retiring, the night before, it had been its usual midnight hue and now—white, snow-white!

But none must ever know!

Quickly reaching for a nearby tiny mallet, she struck it against the silver gong that would summon her handmaid as she made rapid plans. The maid, in all secrecy, could bring several others, skilled in the dyes and beauty appliances of the day. Once her hair had regained its former black lustre, it would be an easy matter to find some trivial grievance that could bring around their deaths. Then none would know. None must ever know.

To herself, Salome vowed that!

SEVENTEEN hundred years later:

The little French maid quietly entered the magnificent suite of the royal mistress, holding the silver tray that contained Madame's morning cocoa. A nearby, highly ornamented clock, told she had arrived at the right moment. Madame was adamant about punctuality.

Quietly the maid entered the bedroom. From the huge canopied bed in one corner of the room, came a soft symmetrical breathing that denoted sleep. Setting the tray on a small table, she paused to pull aside the velvet window drapes. A flood of morning sun-rays came pouring into the room. Several costly garments lay strewn on the floor. A sigh escaped the little maid. Ah, must it not be wonderful to have a king at one's feet and know unlimited power? Quickly her deft hands restored each garment to its proper place. Then with the tray again in hand, she approached the bed, drew aside the canopy, to gaze upon her sleeping mistress and—

"Ma-dame-ee!" screamed the little maid. The silver tray fell to the floor with a crash.

It was enough to awaken the sleeper. Her dark eyes opened, fell upon the maid as an expression, half-anger, half-bewilderment showed on her exquisite features. "Marie!" she exclaimed, rising to a sitting position. "What in the name of—"

"Madame! Your hair! Your hair!"

"My hair?"

Quickly one hand of the royal mistress went to her hair, that thick, wavy hair which had been her crowning glory. Her long, tapering fingers ran through its thickness. Then: "What is the matter with it, you little fool?" she demanded.

"Oh, Madame: you do not understand! You have not seen it!" wailed the other. "Your hair—it is white—all white! Look for yourself, Madame!" Hurrying to a bureau she returned with the ivory-backed mirror she placed in the hand of her mistress.

"Look, Madame! See for yourself!" she almost screamed.

And so Madame Jeanne Du Barry experienced the horror that many other infamous women had known down through the long course of history. Overnight her hair had become white! And like those many others, she managed to keep her secret from the world. While again, like those others, it was as a herald to a downfall, despite its concealment. In her own case, her royal

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lover was to die, four months later; she was banished from the palace at the order of the new King, Louis XVI. Some years later she followed him, crazed with fright and screaming, to that ever rising and falling blade whose thirst for blood seemed insatiable—the guillotine!

ONE HUNDRED and seventy years later:

"The champagne is chilled, the supper snack ready, sir." Hendricks, the butler, personified one in manner, looks, dress and speech.

The words had been addressed to the tall, well-built young man in immaculate evening dress, who stood at the window of his sumptuous penthouse, overlooking the countless golden flashes and twinkles, far below him, that were the lights of New York.

Allen Bedford Marshall III turned. In his early thirties, with wealth and a good social background, Allen Bedford Marshall III was looked upon by mothers of "The four hundred," who had marriageable daughters, as well as by those same daughters themselves, as "a good catch"—a term now given added emphasis by his recent inheriting of some six million dollars.

"Very good, Hendricks," he answered. "Miss La Verne will arrive presently." He turned to the window, as though the matter was settled, when Hendricks spoke again:

"You'll pardon me, Mr. Marshall, sir, but—" He paused as though uncertain of his words.

"Yes, Hendricks."

"Well, sir, I am wondering if you know that Miss La Verne was unable to dance, last night. A sudden illness, so the papers say. As she did not phone today, I thought she might not be able to—"

Allen Bedford Marshall III gave the harsh little laugh that interrupted the other and seemed so strangely out of place. "And you thought she might not come, tonight. Is that it, Hendricks?"

"Well, er—yes, sir," admitted Hendricks.

"She will be here, Hendricks." Allen Bedford Marshall III spoke with grim confidence; his eyes were cold. "Oh, she will be here, all right, Hendricks, and soon." He consulted his wrist watch, then added:

"As a matter of fact, Hendricks, she will be here in exactly two minutes and twenty-four seconds!"

Hendricks showed no surprise. After having been employed by Mr. Marshall for some eight years, nothing should surprise him, he thought. During his years of service, he had heard his master predict hundreds of minor prophecies as to time, the identity and arrival of guests, certain small household events and tragedies—including the time he had warned the maid, employed with her morning dusting, that she would dislodge and break that almost priceless Ming vase—twenty minutes before it happened! And Hendricks had never known his employer to be wrong. He took his departure to await then announce the expected arrival of Mona La Verne.

ALLEN BEDFORD MARSHALL III lit a cigarette, sauntered to a nearby table and the opened book that lay upon it. His eyes fell upon a paragraph that brought a faint smile to his lips. He blew a perfect smoke-ring ceilingward, then read, half aloud:

"Of the Pharoah, Cheops, builder of the great pyramid, little or nothing is known, nor has there been left for posterity anything other than he erected that greatest of all monuments; although there is vague mention that he

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hired out his daughter (her very name is lost to history) as a courtesan, that she might help him with expense in building that vast structure which has for so long withstood the centuries."

Allen Bedford Marshall III broke into a chuckle.

"The name of the daughter of Cheops is lost to history," he spoke softly. "Only a record of her iniquities remain." He blew another smoke-ring before adding: "Ah, what horror would have been yours, Vanya, had you known that only a mention of the evil you strove so desperately to conceal, would go down through the ages, while the name you sought to keep immemorable was to become so insignificant to time and—"

"Miss Mona La Verne," announced Hendricks.

"Allen!" she exclaimed.

She was beautiful, breath-takingly beautiful; there was no denying that. As she advanced towards him in the daringly low-cut evening gown of shimmering white satin, that revealed her shapely arms and shoulders, adorned with the glittering array of numerous gems that had started two well-known Broadway playboys on the road to bankruptcy, even Allen Bedford Marshall III would have admitted it. It was easily understood, he thought, why this tall and regal-like, black-eyed beauty, had Broadway at her feet and news reporters seeking new adjectives.

But he knew how she had attained fame and reached such heights. Yet he smiled, said "Mona," and advanced to meet her.

For a few minutes their talk was general. The discreet Hendricks had retired after having mellowed the room with the right lights and the champagne decanter left conveniently near at hand, while a costly radio played the dreamy music of a famous waltz-king. It was Mona La Verne who presently asked:

"And now tell me, Allen. Why all this mystery? I was to come here, tonight, alone, and to tell no one." Her perfectly-shaped lips, painted a bright red, gave that dazzling smile known to thousands of theatre goers. "Well, I have done as you asked, and you have as yet to tell me why. And you know I cannot stand suspense." Her white hand pinched his cheek with tender fingers.

"Naughty boy!" said Mona La Verne.

"You have no idea, absolutely none, why I have made such a request?" he asked quietly, almost wearily.

"Well—well, Allen—" She spoke with the ease of a sophisticate then laughed. "Here; refill my glass, Allen Marshall," she said with feigned sternness. "Then sit down beside me, come to the point—and tell me!"

"And there are about six million good reasons why I am going to say, 'yes'," thought the secretly shrewd and ultra social ambitious Mona.

He was quick to obey. From the radio came strains of a once popular and recently revived melody. Mona La Verne hummed the first chorus, then broke into a soft singing at its repetition, while Marshall hovered just above her and champagne bubbled into her outstretched glass.

"I'll see you in my dreams.
Hold you in my dreams.
Someone took you out of my arms,
Still I feel the thrill of your charms."

One of her hands went to his; her dark eyes, beaming, smiled into his own; while the fragrance of a delicate perfume came to him, together with the slight rustle of satin. She sang throatily:

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"Lips that once were mine.
Tender eyes that shine.
They will light my way tonight.
I'll see you in my dreams."

A BRIEF silence, then: "It is a beautiful song, Allen."

"It was beautifully sung, Mona," he answered and sat beside her.

"And now for that big surprise!" Mona La Verne was never one to let grass grow under her feet.

"It may not be a welcome one," he reminded.

She laughed: "I am willing to take that risk. Oh come, Allen, what is it?" she asked.

"But I am serious, Mona. Many surprises are unwelcome; some of them tragic. For instance, yesterday when I heard of the sudden illness that forced you to cancel your dancing engagement. Do you think that was pleasant to me? Nor could that same illness have been a welcome surprise to you. It was illness, of course, Mona?" he added.

She regarded him with a quizzical expression. "Why, certainly, Allen," she answered after a brief pause.

"You are sure?"

"I am very sure!" and there was an impatience in her tone. "But really, Allen, I fail to see the humor of all this or why——"

"Liar!"

Mona La Verne had encountered many surprises in her life, but it was the first time she had known an astonishment so great as to temporary benumb speech. For as Marshall snapped out the word, he brought his hand down on her wrist, in a movement that sent the glass flying from her hand as part of its contents was sprayed upon her.

"Yes, liar!" he went on. "Liar and murderess, now as in many of your former lives! Oh you are surprised that I should know, but did I not warn you that surprises are often unwelcome? Yet it is not what you have done in this life that made me wish to have you alone with me here, tonight. No, instead you are going to learn of another; a long-gone, distant one!"

The eyes of Allen Bedford Marshall III seemed to have been suddenly replaced by those of some wild creature who had roamed steaming, horrible jungles at the earliest dawn of history. His muscular body tensed, as that of a well-trained and sinew-hardened athlete, about to begin a gruelling ordeal.

MONA LA VERNE shrank before him, looked wildly around her as though for aid or some escape before her eyes again went to his.

"Listen," he went on. "To the best of your knowledge, we first met some seven months ago. As I said, it matters little to me what you have done in this life—your many petty treacheries and the manner in which you rose from poverty to comparative fame—though the police might be interested in that incident which caused the, and for you most convenient and timely death of Myra Rudell, which gave you your first big chance for success."

As he spoke the last words, one hand reached out to touch the nearby button which plunged the room into darkness.

"Allen!" At last the terrified beauty was able to find her tongue, though she spoke in a frightened whisper. "What are you saying? Have you gone mad? What are you going to do?" She made an attempt to rise but the strong hand on her own held her as might have an iron shackle.

"What am I going to do? I am going to recall the past to you. You are about to know why I wished to have you here tonight."

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"Allen! Oh—"

"Look straight ahead!" he commanded. "Look straight before you and believe what your eyes are going to see, even though your senses reel. Cease struggling and obey, for you have at least one consolation. No harm will come to you this night by my hand."

There was a moment's silence while the two sat in the darkness. And then there occurred that which brought a gasp from the lips of Mona La Verne. For seemingly from the eyes of Allen Bedford Marshall III shot the pale, weird glow, similar to that which had appeared in the little hut, far down the Nile, some fifty centuries earlier. A glow that flowed from Marshall to the far wall, twenty feet away.

"No!" exclaimed Mona La Verne.

"Yes!" snapped Allen Bedford Marshall III.

For a series of pictures were appearing on that wall. Pictures similar, clear and life-like as any reflected on a cinema screen. And they showed laboring thousands, urged on by the whips of grim-faced overseers, struggling to complete a gigantic structure. Unthinkingly, Mona La Verne glared frantically around her. But Marshall, as if knowing her thoughts, said a grim:

"No; you will not find any hidden camera. What you see are mental reflections, though very tangible ones. Do not ask 'Hows' and 'Whys', for it is as much of a mystery to me as to you—the power that is mine. But the pictures?" he went on. "Do you recognize the scene before you?"

"Why—why, yes!" came her awed whisper. "It is the building of the pyramid. But in the name of Heaven how—"

"Never mind," was the answer, his eyes gazing steadily on the scene before him. "What do you know of the great pyramid?" he asked.

Plainly she could see some of the toil and suffering known by the ancients in the building of that mighty monument. All around and upon it were countless laborers, semi-nude and perspiring as gigantic blocks of stone were slowly swung into place and clouds of dust rose skyward. The whips of the overseers fell constantly, muscular frames exerted every sinew. She could see several, who had fallen under that gruelling toil, being dragged away by others, as well as the many women who carried water in goat-skinned sacks.

"Answer! What do you know of the great pyramid?" repeated Marshall.

"Know? Why, nothing!"

With an effort her eyes went from the scene before her to the man beside her. But he was staring straight ahead.

"I know practically nothing of the great pyramid; only what I've read of it. It is supposed to be one of the oldest structures in the world, built thousands of years ago by an ancient Pharoah named—named—"

"Cheops," he supplied. "Would you like to see him?"

More than anything else, Mona La Verne would have liked to scream then reach the elevator in the hall without. But Marshall still held her hand in a vice-like grip. Yet all this—it was impossible! Perhaps she would presently awake to find it had been but some bad dream and—

"Look!" she heard. "It is the Pharaoh Cheops!"

AGAIN her eyes went to the far wall. The scene had changed somewhat, though the mighty pyramid and toiling thousands could be seen, dimly in the background. But directly before her, muscular slaves carried a litter on

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which sat a swarthy, stern-eyed man, bedecked in the finest raiment of ancient Egypt and frowning as he watched the progress of the workers. High in the heavens the sun cast angry flares. Tensed, fascinated, she could almost feel the appalling heat, realize the anguish of the toiling slaves and why the long-lashed whips fell so steadily; though he on the litter was amply protected by the canopy above him, as well as the huge fans, continually waved in the seemingly tireless arms of his attendants.

Then, as she continued to watch, the already frightened Mona La Verne knew that stark terror which brought a gasp from her lips and half-rose her to her feet. For strange, nay impossible as it might seem, to her there came a realization, something which told that the Pharaoh upon the litter, a Pharaoh who had reigned thousands of years ago was—was not unknown to her!

Sheer madness? Of course! Yet she could not deny that something, like a dim and hazy revelation, struggling for recognition; that mighty, irresistible something, which seemed to be shaking her very being as a Titan's hand might a doll. Palm trees, pyramids and temples streamed across her memory—mental pictures of an ancient land where she had been one of power. Then as she continued to watch, open-mouthed and wide-eyed, she realized or at least accepted one fact:

She had, in some distant era, not only seen the Pharaoh, Cheops, she had known him—known him well!

"Do you recognize him, Mona?" spoke Marshall quietly.

But even in that moment, her quick wits did not desert her. No, he must not know! It could only be for some sinister purpose that he wished her to admit she did. With an effort she turned to him. "Recognize him?" she asked. "How absurd. How could I possibly recognize him? And now, Allen, enough of this and—"

"Silence!" he commanded.

"Of course you're lying," he went on. "No one knows that better than yourself. There is every reason why you should recognize Cheops the Pyramid Builder. 'Why?' you ask. I'll tell you and in doing so, enlighten you on many things. It will be a strange story," he warned. "The strangest story ever told. But it is a true one; when I have finished you will realize that. Heed me well, then, and listen."

There was a brief silence. In the darkness they sat, as might have two immobile statues. From far below there came the flashes of countless lights and a rumble of traffic—the din and flare of a modern world; a fitting accompaniment to Marshall's steady voice as he related a tale of an ancient one.

IT WAS (he began) a long, long time ago—some fifty weary centuries ago when Netheru Kheuf, or Cheops, as he is best known to the modern world, reigned on the throne of old Egypt.

It was a reign marked with suffering and bloodshed. For long before the death of the Pharaoh, Sephuris, the young prince, Cheops, had been possessed with that one desire which grew to the proportions of madness—his wish to build a tomb of such size and splendor that it would not only outrival any built by his predecessors, but be of such breath-taking enormity that no king, destined to reign in distant centuries to follow, could ever hope to construct one, half its equal.

And so the land of Egypt was plunged into sorrow, famine and despair. For the Pharaoh Cheops not only closed the many temples, but for years forced the prime of Egyptian manhood to labor on his mighty monu-

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ment, working in relays of a hundred thousand men, every three months. That this so woefully interfered with the harvests of the land did not deter him. Indeed, he was constantly sending out troops of his soldiers, to all corners of his known realm, to force into labor all able-bodied men who sought to evade the ordeals of building the great pyramid, while the elders of the land withheld their tongues and the women beat their breasts amid tears, as their loved ones were forced to labor, in slavery on that greatest of structures.

Yes, heedless to all else but the building of his colossal tomb, the cruelties and avarice of the Pharaoh ever grew till the name of Cheops was feared throughout Egypt. Ah, but—and this is a fact long lost to history—there was a name the inhabitants of that ancient land feared even more. So very much more. And that was the name of Vanya—Vanya, the daughter of Cheops, Princess of all Egypt.

What was there about that weird beauty which caused both slaves and battle-hardened soldiers to pale at the approach of her massive litter, while it was said even her mighty sire regarded her in awe and sought to avoid her?

Could it be as so many whispered, that she was too beautiful to be real? Was there truth to the rumors that she would never age nor had been born to this world? It was said that often, in the dead of night, she could be seen alone, far out on the desert among the tombs of long-departed kings, that terrible screams could be heard and she returned to the palace only in the eerie hours before dawn, her weird sea-green eyes sparkling with unholy ecstasy, her agate-like nails gleaming as jewels, her lips stained a bright crimson!

There were stories told of the many youths and nobles who found temporary favor in her smile then mysteriously disappeared, no more to be seen or heard of.

Yet all that might have been ignored or silenced, for she was the Princess of Egypt, were it not for that most terrible of all earthly rumors. Behind barred doors and in secluded places men whispered of it. Ah, yes; though the Gods themselves might frown and smite them dead, it persisted. It was told that every six moons, accompanied by a small guard of terrorized slaves and soldiers, forced to accompany her then later slain to maintain secrecy, that the daughter of Cheops journeyed down the Nile, then far into the desolate, unknown wastes to the west, towards the one place it was said that even the Gods feared—The Forbidden Valley!

Yes, the Princess Vanya was a mystery to old Egypt. A sinister, terrible mystery, that quailed the attendants of the court by day and caused them to dread each sundown.

AND THEN, in the twenty-fourth year of her life, there came to the palace the handsome Sakura. Captain Sakura, who had so distinguished himself in guarding Egypt's borders from the barbarians in the south, and the howling hill tribes of the wilderness of Paran. Was it the will of the Gods that the eyes of Princess Vanya were to behold him as he made his triumphant entry into the capitol city? Who can say? But whatever the reason, fate decreed that the warrior Sakura was to know the strangest experience that ever fell to the lot of any human, before or since.

For one night he was summoned, in secrecy and by a trusted slave, to the quarters of the Princess of Egypt. There, alone with the bewildered and awed Sakura, the beauteous Vanya smiled and talked in soft words of his

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great strength and valor.

And as the night grew older and the world slept, her smile became more beguiling, her soft voice but a whisper as, with half-parted lips and half-closed eyes she drew ever nearer and spoke to him of love. He knew the fragrance of her breath, he felt her white arms steal around him. It was a wild and half-maniacal scream that suddenly rang out to desecrate the quiet beauty of the night.

"What? You would dare spurn the love of Vanya? You would try to resist her?"

The Princess Vanya had sprung to her feet. Ah, but she was not smiling now. Instead, those green eyes were flashing a beast-like fury, her breasts rising and falling, her hands clenched, and long, clear nails gleaming in the torchlight. "Filth of the Nile!" she shrieked. "I'll have your eyes for this!"

And why had Sakura resisted the advances of that almost unearthly beauty? Briefly, because he was a man of honor who loved and was betrothed to a slender, dark-eyed maid, that lived in his native village, far down the Nile — the maid, Ivis, his childhood sweetheart.

Tactfully he tried to explain as much.

"Believe me, Princess Vanya," he pleaded. "My sword, my life is ever yours, to protect you. I live only to fight your enemies and those of your mighty father. But—but I love the maid Ivis, and I—"

A sweep of her hand to his cheek broke short his words. Those gleaming nails slashed down his face to leave miniature blood trails. And then the Princess of Egypt sprang to the nearby door, flung it back to scream:

"Guards! Guards!"

Those two words sealed the fate of Sakura. Mighty guardsmen hurried, to fling themselves upon him. He spent the rest of the night in a dismal dungeon. With the coming of dawn he knew his fate. He was exiled to the domains in the north, there to be worked in a dreaded stone quarry till death alone could claim him. Why he was not slain outright will forever remain a mystery. Princess Vanya was not usually given to such clemency.

Two years passed before they were destined to meet again. But during those years Sakura had done many things. After laboring five months in the stone quarry, he escaped. A hurried flight to the south and his native village revealed that his beloved Ivis had been horribly tortured then slain —killed for no reason other than she had loved and been loved by one who had spurned the advances of Princess Vanya.

Then Sakura, with but one purpose in mind, travelled far into the unknown wastes to the west, accompanied only by the ancient sage, Karamus. There they found and learned the gruesome secret of The Forbidden Valley. There they planned vengeance and waited. Nor was it long till they had achieved that vengeance in a terrible manner—in a terrible, almost unbelievable manner!

HERE, Allen Bedford Marshall III paused in his story.

"Do I bore you, Mona?" he asked quietly. "Does this tale of a long-gone age prove uninteresting, or would you care to hear the rest?"

Her eyes went to his. Despite the semi-darkness of the room he could see the expression, half-fear, half-bewilderment, on her now pale-white face and the strained manner in which she leaned forward in her chair.

"No. Do not stop. Continue!" she whispered. "What happened to the Princess Vanya?"

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"I thought you would say as much, Mona," he answered. "It is not of her cruelties, of her ordering the death of the maid, Ivis, and bringing the doom of countless innocent ones that concerns you so much as to what her own fate eventually was.

"Yes, I thought as much," he added. "I will go so far as to say that parts of the story are even vaguely familiar to you. Why?" He gave a grim chuckle. "You will soon know. Yes, you will very soon know, Mona, but I will obey your wish. I will continue the story, starting with that hour when Sakura and the aged Karamus, standing on a high peak, first beheld the far-away approach of the Princess Vanya and her escort."

IT WAS (he went on) on a late afternoon—a late afternoon on a long-gone day when history was still young and most of the crimes of man had yet to be written.

"They are coming, Karamus. Once more the Princess Vanya approaches The Forbidden Valley. True, she knows some of its terrible secrets but you and I know them all. Our many days spent here have not gone unrewarded. We are ready, Karamus. The hour of vengeance is at hand!"

It was Sakura who spoke. They stood on one of the high peaks which encompassed that most feared place of the ancient world—The Forbidden Valley! Far below them was that little vale itself, but a good stone's throw from end to end, half of that in width and completely surrounded by a series of lofty mountain peaks. Ah, that Valley itself was sinister enough; its very air seemed shrouded in mystery. But what stood out above all else was that age-blackened, hoary structure which rose up in its center—a square and tiny structure, crumbling to ruin. Yes, crumbling to ruin, five thousand years ago!

The Gods alone know what race really did erect it!

Karamus shaded his eyes. Some two miles away a small company was steadily approaching. For a long while the two watched in silence while the others drew ever nearer. At last they halted. Sakura broke the silence to explain:

"They are going to make camp, Karamus. They are still a good mile away, but the Princess Vanya has given word for them to halt."

"A command which they readily obey," commented the other.

"True; nothing could please them better. They would flee this place as though a thousand demons were at their heels, but for their fear of the Princess of Egypt. Yet it is as I expected. Vanya always halts her followers a mile from The Forbidden Valley. Then, alone and at night, she comes here. The reason we both know."

"And she will be here, tonight," went on Sakura. "When the moon is high in the sky she will come once more to The Forbidden Valley, a torch in one hand, in the other, no doubt, one more trophy to add to her terrible collection."

"She will reach the valley by the tiny pass that leads through the mountains?"

"Of course. It is the only access to The Forbidden Valley, other than the tortuous ordeal of scaling the high cliffs which guard it. But come, we will descend. Night will soon be upon us and we must be ready. You remember what I expect of you?"

Karamus nodded. "I have not forgotten," he remarked.

IT LACKED only some few minutes from the midnight hour, that distant night, when the Princess Vanya

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entered The Forbidden Valley, via the narrow, winding passage that led through the mountains—and she was quite alone.

Yes, the Princess of Egypt was alone; and as Sakura had foretold, in one hand she held a flaming torch, in the other some rather cumbersome object, well concealed in yards of a dark wrapping. Overhead the stars were shining, a full moon shone in the sky, while all around those mighty peaks loomed high into the night. But the green eyes of Vanya were solely upon the ancient structure which rose up in the center of that silent valley. Then a smile played at the corners of her perfect mouth, those red lips parted.

"At last, my lovers," she spoke quietly. "Six moons have finally past and I return to you once more." Her voice was soft and musical; she added: "And I have brought with me still another, a companion who comes to cheer you during the many lonely hours till I visit you again."

With parted lips she threw back her head, to give the laugh that sounded as the jingle of far-away sleigh bells; then the Princess of Egypt began a steady advance towards the tiny structure before her.

Yes, that night the strangest creature that ever walked this planet, once more made her way up The Forbidden Valley. Dressed in the raiments of ancient Egypt, to be sure—Flimsy, four-slit skirt, cobra-ensigned headband and breast-plates of beaten gold, encrusted with jewels—but that weird beauty did not appear as one of this world. That perfect body was too perfect, that wondrous face too wondrous—a beauty so unbelievable, barbaric and unearthly, as to be both dazzling and terrifying. Yes, sometimes I do believe that she might not have been born to this world.

But try to picture that scene. In the dead of night, five thousand years ago, a long-limbed Princess made her way up a terrible valley, torch in hand. Far above her flashed the stars and planets. Away to the north the great pyramid was but half completed, its builders slept. A wandering night zephyr found her and sighed, to whip back her flimsy dress and expose a shapely thigh, while those green eyes flashed as emeralds and she drew ever nearer to the small structure that lay ahead.

WATCHING from behind a massive boulder, the aged Karamus had seen the advance and entrance of the Princess of Egypt into the building before him—"The Temple of Horror," he had named it.

Then, quietly, he crept forward, remembering every word of the warrior, Sakura, as to what was expected of him. He reached the stout, wooden door that Vanya had unbolted. Unthinkingly he cast a nervous glance ahead, though none knew better than himself that it was needless. No other would dare enter that forbidden vale. Then, cautiously, he peered into The Temple of Horror.

Back towards him, stood the Princess of Egypt. The torch she had secured in a small niche near the doorway, cast golden flares to all parts of that tiny, one roomed structure; and although he could not see her face, the aged Karamus needed little imagination to realize the quiet smile that was upon it. For the Princess was gazing on the stern faces of her former lovers!

Her former lovers?

Yes—the heads of all of them were mounted on the surrounding walls, as a big game hunter might mount the heads of his trophies!

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AH, DID I not tell you the Princess Vanya was the strangest creature that ever walked this planet?

Yes, that was the reason of her secretive journeys, every six months, to The Forbidden Valley. Once tired of a lover, the fickle Vanya saw to it that he was promptly slain. That done, with a skill no modern taxidermist could ever hope to equal, her own hands would mount the head, then bring it to this one so feared place, that there was no danger of her secret being discovered. Then, to her, there was that ghastly joy—to return to jeer at those dead heads and laugh at their silence.

"Greetings, my lovers!"

It was the voice of Princess Vanya. Slowly her gaze went from one mounted head to another, her quiet smile revealing perfect white teeth. "Have you missed me, my darlings? Oh, I know it has been a wearisome wait, but your Vanya has returned to spend these dark hours with you."

She walked to the mounted head, directly before her.

"Ah, Sennhaddon, you are still here. My mighty Assyrian warrior still waits for his Vanya. But you do not speak. You do not tell me again and again of your great strength and your many victories. Why so silent now, Sennhaddon? You were ever a boaster."

One perfect shoulder slightly shrugged. "Perhaps that's why I wearied of you."

"You, Jadheri," she spoke to another. "Are you content to be here or do you wish to see your beloved Ur once more?" A little laugh tinkled from red lips, then; "But where is Natan—my poor, jealous Natan? Ah, there you are!"

Her eyes had gone to the far wall, upon which but one head was mounted; a head so remarkably preserved that the features were plainly discernible—those of a hairless, weak-chinned youth, scarcely more than a boy. The Princess Vanya advanced towards it.

"Ah, poor Natan," she spoke in mock sorrow. "Why am I so cruel as to keep you from the others? Can it be I admire you so much more than they; that I, too, am jealous and would keep you from them? Or is it because I know what a craven you were in life, and hope the fear of darkness here is but increased by the fact that you are apart from the rest?

Those green eyes narrowed, her voice hardened. "C o w a r d!" she snapped and her hand flew to the dead face in the resounding crack that rang out in horrible, hollow vibration.

And so the Princess Vanya went from one head to another—eleven in all. Before some she paused but briefly, to others her stay was more lengthy. But all of them received her scorn, her ridicule, her laughter. Then, standing in the center of the room, with those dead eyes upon her, that gruesome place rang with peals of ever rising laughter, which rippled through the open doorway and far down the valley.

While just without, the awaiting Karamus made ready. The moment was almost at hand for his brief bit in that night's work. Sakura would do the rest!

"AND NOW, my lovers, come to attention, for I have brought you a companion!"

In that small niche near the doorway, the lone t o r c h flamed and crackled. In its golden reflections, Karamus could see the Princess of Egypt; could hear her: "Yes, I have brought still another to join you, my darlings. And he must be given every respect, every attention, mind you, for he was a noble in his distant country—

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a wild and primitive little land, far to the east."

And with that, calmly she unwrapped and displayed her latest mounting—holding it high in that horrible chamber with the silence of the dead around her.

"See, my lovers! Was he not handsome? Far more handsome than you, Rakalus. Much more interesting than you, Sennhaddon. He talked always as the dreamer, of the beauty of desert nights and the glory of golden dawns. Like all of you, he was a fool in one way or another. But come; you must see him closer."

And with her ghastly trophy, the Princess of Egypt went slowly around the room, holding it before every trophy, displaying it to each mounted head. Presently:

"But beside whom should he be placed, my darlings? Which of you should be honored by such a companion? You, Ekud? No; you were ever ignorant—more stupid than a crocodile. You, Tanus? No; I doubt if you would appreciate one so far above you. Ah, I fear I must look elsewhere."

"You, Natan!" she exclaimed. "Why did I not think of it before? He will make an ideal companion for you. You can tell him of your fears, he will speak to you of beauty. Why, perhaps in time the two of you——"

But the sentence was cut short; for at that instant the torch was suddenly whisked from the niche, the room plunged into darkness, the door slammed shut. And even as she turned there came a sound of the bar that held it being shot into place. In a Stygian blackness the Princess of Egypt was imprisoned with the heads of her many lovers!

A cry of astonishment rang from her lips, in an instant she reached the doorway. But scarcely had her two white fists began to rain a futile volley of blows upon the sturdy barrier, when a voice broke through the gloom, which caused her to desist and wheel in amazement.

"Surely you would not leave us, Princess. Do not leave your lovers. The eager lips of all of us are waiting for your kisses!" The words were followed by a low, derisive chuckle, a brief silence, then from the opposite side of the room she heard:

"Yes, stay with us, oh Vanya. But let I alone know your love. Come then; make your way through the darkness to your Natan—your lonely, jealous Natan. Know once more my kisses, caress the cheek you struck, and I will sing again my love song: Beneath the Naked Moon!"

And the Princess of Egypt recognized the quiet voice as that of her dead lover, Natan!

FLATTENED against the doorway, stood the wide-eyed Vanya. Natan's voice—yes! Even the very song he mentioned he had sung to her many times. But Natan was dead! Natan was dead! She had personally witnessed his execution, three years back thirty-six long moons ago! Gods of the Underworld, was it possible that—

Vanya, Princess of Egypt, had nerves of iron. The fact she would dare enter The Forbidden Valley proved it. That she would come again and again to that lonely, crumbling structure, laughing and taunting its silent inmates throughout the hours of darkness, but further proclaimed it. But always, before, the door had been opened, with the flare of a torch to lighten the gloom. Always, before, hers had been the only voice, hers the unquestioned authority. But now—now—

Then as she stood in awed uncertainty, out of the blackness directly before her came a harsh peal of laugh-

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ter and:

"No, no! Do not go to that cowardly jackal, Princess Vanya. Come to Sennhaddon, your boastful, Sennhaddon. Draw closer to me, my treacherous darling, and I will tell you more stories of the strength and valor that was mine!"

The voice rose and quickened.

"Who knows, comrades?" rang out loudly. "Perhaps before the hour of dawn, I will have avenged us all and achieved my greatest victory. Yes, by the bones of The Hawk-Kings, I might yet find strength to leave this cursed wall and bury my teeth into the soft throat of Egypt's Princess!"

And as there came again that harsh peal of laughter, Vanya of Egypt gave the wild scream that echoed with it, as, like some mad thing she again turned to the doorway, beating, scratching frenziedly upon it—snapping short those long, sparkling nails; clawing as might a trapped, fear-crazed animal, till her once shapely hands were battered and blood-smeared.

"It is useless, Vanya! Useless!" rang out behind her. "The Gods themselves have ordained you remain here! The Gods have decided that you perish here—miserably! Who but they know what that end will be? Ah, if they will grant the wish that is mine, perhaps it will be I, Sennhaddon, who brings around your doom!"

And there came a loud, rapid clatter of wood, as though the dead sought to leave its mounting and fling itself upon her!

BUT WHY continue to tell of those following hours? Of course by this time you have guessed it was Sakura imitating those voices. To be sure, it was. During the three months spent in The Forbidden Valley, awaiting the coming of Vanya, Sakura had learned many things that she, herself, was unaware of. It was he who discovered the secret panel which led to the narrow passage encircling the chamber. It was he, who with mallet and chisel, had hewn the small, square holes through the walls of that passage, which ended directly behind each mounting in the chamber beyond—permitting him to move and rattle those ghastly trophies yet remain unseen; though the latter precaution was hardly necessary in that Erebus blackness.

And, unknown to the Princess of Egypt, Sakura had once known both Senhaddon and Natan. It was not difficult to imitate their voices to a perfection that might well deceive the terrorized Vanya.

And so passed the night, as, running silently up and down the hidden passage, his bare feet made noiseless by the sand he had strewn on its floor for that very purpose, Sakura hurried to the various chiseled openings, shouting, whispering threats and mockeries; laughing in derision dimmed by the screams of his terrorized captive.

And as the hours passed those screams rose higher, became more terrible. Then gradually they lessened and changed to a horrible, maniacal babbling that finally lowered to the frequent, idiotic gibbering and whispering, similar to that which might come from the cell of a hopeless lunatic!

IN THE rays of a golden dawn, Sakura, emerging from a well concealed exit in the rear of the structure, approached the awaiting Karamus.

"All has been still for quite some time," he spoke. "Perhaps she sleeps."

The other nodded. "We will soon know," he answered. "And I, for one, am glad the night is over. Standing here beneath the stars, hearing those shrieks which seemed endless—" He

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broke off the words with a head-shake. "Yours was indeed a terrible vengeance, Sakura."

"Come," said the other. "We will release her and make certain." Between them, the wooden bar was removed, door flung open, and sun rays poured into that dismal chamber to clearly reveal its interior.

DIRECTLY before them, on its floor, the morning sunshine streaming through the doorway and upon her as a golden spotlight, was Vanya, Princess of Egypt. Even as they entered, her gaze went toward them in a slow, mechanical manner, her face tilted sideways. One hand made an aimless gesture. Abruptly the two halted, aghast at what their eyes beheld.

Could this be the same brilliant, fearless beauty of only a few hours ago? It seemed incredible! For those once flawless features had been repeatedly lacerated and torn—a victim of her own frenzied fear during those hours of mental torture. Breast-plates discarded, the eyes that went to theirs were dull and staring. There was that awful sagging of her chin, the indifference as to their presence. Then from her parted lips came that harsh little titter as she rose slowly to her feet—her flimsy garments torn to shreds by her own hands and begrimed by the dust of the floor.

Overnight the Princess of Egypt had become a hopeless maniac! And the once glorious, wavy black hair was white—snow-white!

Together the two men assisted her through the doorway and into the full glare of the morning sun. There, as she looked around her in a dull mindless manner: "Her reason, Sakura!" whispered Karamus. "The Gods have taken it from her! And her hair—it is white!"

"It was she who gave the command which took Ivis from me," was the other's answer.

"True. But, mercy of Osiris—" began Karamus then his voice broke off.

In the glare of a morning sun stood Vanya of Egypt, her gaze going to the high peaks which surrounded that terrible valley, the occasional little titter escaping her lips and apparently unaware of the two beside her, who watched in horrified fascination. High overhead a solitary bird winged its lonely flight and the eyes of Cheops' daughter followed it in minor interest, till it disappeared from view and naught but a blue sky was above her.

In a jerky, mechanical manner she took several paces forward, paused and tensed herself as one about to begin some barbaric dance. Then, as though for the first time aware that the gaze of the two was upon her, she wheeled and faced them.

A wild fear leaped to her eyes, she threw her hands before her. And then, with that blood-chilling scream, Vanya of Egypt turned and began her mad run up the valley.

Yes, as though the legions of hell itself were at her heels and sought to claim her, the once fearless daughter of Cheops dashed up The Forbidden Valley in the light of that long-gone dawn, with a speed made possible only when terror is the pace-maker—her continuous screams echoing behind her and reaching the ears of her erstwhile captors; while that long, now snow-white hair whipped full length in the breeze, as did the few tattered shreds that still clung to her.

Twice she turned to cast a fear-crazed glance over her shoulder. Once she lost her step and fell, to go sprawling, full-length, upon the hard, stone-strewn ground. But she was up the next instant to resume her mad flight;

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and perhaps it was instinct or perhaps sheer luck which finally brought her to the narrow pass—the exit from The Forbidden Valley.

But find it she did; and as Sakura and Karamus watched from afar, she plunged down it and disappeared from view while her screams grew ever fainter, to finally die away and all was still.

Later, the slaves and warriors who had been her escort found her, wandering, mindless, gibbering, several miles to the north of The Forbidden Valley. It was they who returned her to the palace of her sire. And for years afterwards all Egypt spoke in whispers of the mad and white-haired woman, who lived in seclusion in one wing of the Pharoah's great palace and made nights hideous with her screams.

PERHAPS my story should end here. But there are still several matters that must be told for a clear understanding.

As I have said, the Gods alone know who erected that little structure which rose up in The Forbidden Valley, as well as for what purpose it was built. Vanya, herself, had come upon it quite by chance, and had used it for that terrible reason of which you are aware. But what had been its original purpose? Could it have been erected as a holy of holies or for some place of worship, by a strange, unknown race of this world, or even an alien one from another, thousand of years before the first Pharaoh reigned on the throne of Egypt? Who can truly say?

Be that as it may, I do know this: Gigantic boulders topped nearly every peak of the mountains which surrounded that valley—most of them balancing at such precarious angles that the strength of a strong, determined man might send them toppling to the vale below. In the week which followed, Sakura and Karamus did just that—struggling with then plunging the gigantic rocks from the peaks, which resulted in the great land slide that finally hid The Forbidden Valley for all time from the eyes of man. Then the two began their long journey back to the little village, far down the Nile.

But scarcely had three months passed when Sakura first became aware of that strange power—being able to see and know the future incarnations that were to be his. Yes, though unable to change the course of fate, Sakura the Egyptian was suddenly granted the weird gift which remained with him during every existence, and clearly revealed not only his past but the future. And it was the latter which gave him hope. For he knew then, as he does now, that upon some distant day he would once more hold his beloved Ivis in his arms.

And why, of all men alone, should he know that power? Is it possible, could it really be that those who erected that little structure in The Forbidden Valley, smiled upon him for punishing the wicked woman who had profaned it? And might it not be that in some inexplicable manner, even from beyond the veil itself, they were able to so mysteriously reward him, as no man has been rewarded, before or since? I wonder!

HIS STORY concluded, Allen Bedford Marshall III turned to the woman beside him. Her dark eyes stared into his own.

For a long moment neither of them spoke, then: "What you have told me—it is true!" came her awed whisper. "Gods of the Ancients—it—is—true! I know it is!" And although unaware of the fact, Mona La Verne was speaking in the tongue of ancient Egypt—speaking in a language she had neither

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known nor even heard in this life!

Slowly those wondrous eyes were widening, as though she was at last aware of a colossal realization, while high above the great city of New York murky clouds were scudding across the moon. "You—you were Sakura!" she went on. "And Vanya? Yes—yes, I once was Vanya, the daughter of Cheops! By Ptah, I know it! I did live in those distant days, centuries before the barge of Cleopatra floated down the Nile!"

Through a half-opened window a night zephyr, floating into the darkened room, sobbed as might a Banshee's wail, warning the nearness of death.

"You lived in many ages, down through the long course of history. Salome, the barbaric Queen Thomysis and Du Barry. They are but a few of the names that were yours through the centuries," Marshall answered in Egyptian, and, like Mona La Verne, apparently unmindful that he did so. "Each of them, all of them, was Vanya of Egypt—Vanya in but another of her many incarnations!"

Then he said: "But stranger still, is the fact that always in each incarnation, you knew the same blight—the sudden changing of your hair from midnight blackness to a snow-white hue." His voice rose. "And almost invariably that change was as a herald of your doom or downfall from power!

"That is why you failed to dance, last night," he added. "The reason was not illness, it was shock—shock by the fact that upon arising, yesterday morning, you discovered your once so black hair, you have now dyed to its former color, had become white overnight—snow-white!"

Together they arose, Marshall releasing the arm he had been holding so steadily. "Is there anything more you wish to know?" he asked. "Perhaps I should not have told you the story at all, but I could not remain silent. I wanted you to know your evil past, as well as how I so well avenged the death of my Ivis and—"

"But you say I lived many other lives," she broke in. "How then—"

"I was able to see and know every existence that was yours. In a little village in Gaul I fought against the legions of Caligula, while in a distant mountain in Palestine you whirled in the barbaric dance that claimed the head of the Baptist. I served under Hannibal when he drew near to Rome, and knew that you dwelt in that city. I fought against the Huns of Attila at Chalons, while you were the temporarily favorite mistress of the brutal 'Scourge of God'. Why, I was even with Clive at Plassey, when he destroyed the forces of the Nawob and you fled with your royal lover, the mad Suraj Ud Doulah—he who was responsible for the horrors of The Black Hole!"

A wan smile flitted across his features.

"But it was as I told you. Though I well knew the whereabout of both you and my Ivis, in each of my many existences, I could not change fate nor what was destined to be. Always, it was the same; as though a mental and mighty, invisible wall was before me, when I tried to thwart the natural courses of any of my lives."

A LITTLE laugh escaped his lips; a strange, mirthless chuckle which told of an agony that has burned itself to ashes and can burn no more.

"And so I had to go on and on—and wait. I had to wait and know the countless hours of the centuries, as the world grew ever older. I had to wait till fate destined our paths would cross again. Five thousand years ago I knew

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I would meet you in this life. Two hundred more must follow before I will again know Ivis."

"And Ivis? She is alive now?" asked Mona La Verne.

He gave a sigh of weariness. "Yes, Ivis is alive. In distant Greece she now lives, under the regime of a tyrant even more ruthless than your ancient sire. But I cannot help, I cannot aid her, much as I wish to. It is so destined."

"But about myself—myself in this life?" she went on. "You say my own doom is at hand. You say—" a sob escaped her. "Oh, I don't want to die! No matter what I did in ages past, no matter what I've done in this life—I don't want to die! I am young; I am beautiful. I have Broadway at my feet. Once this war is over, it will mean triumphs for me in London, Paris and Vienna. Counts, Dukes and Lords flocking around me, eager to serve the slightest whim of the great Mona La Verne. Why, who knows—"

"No, Mona," he broke in. "It is not so. Your ambitions are not to be realized. Instead, you are destined to know a hideous fate!" And it was at that same instant they heard:

"You are both destined to know a hideous fate!"

APPARENTLY from nowhere, the words had rung out. At the same instant, another pale, phosphorescent-like glow shot across the room to the far wall. But this time, not from the eyes of Allen Bedford Marshall. No! Instead, it was streaming through the open window, then rising up into the night, as though it might have originated from the great void overhead. And even as the two wheeled, in open-mouthed surprise, there appeared on the wall that which brought a gasp from Marshall and a terrorized sob from the beauteous woman beside him.

For directly before them was what appeared as an enormous picture, realistic, life-like, and covering the entire wall. A picture which showed a small, crude hut, upon the banks of a majestic river—a river that sparkled as liquid silver in the bright rays of a full moon, that also revealed several scattered palm trees—like exclamation points in the poetry of that peaceful scene.

But what was of far more interest to them was the figure issuing from the door of that hut and advancing slowly towards them—a frail and slender old man who wore only a scanty, cloth-like wrapping around his waist and leaned heavily on the staff he carried. Nearer, nearer he came, to pause at last, directly before them, as might an actor in a modern cinema close-up. For a moment there was silence as he regarded them; a silence so intense it demanded speech; a silence so dynamic it seemed to stand apart from time as though held there in a frame. Then they saw a movement of his lips and heard again:

"Yes; both of you are destined to know a hideous fate!"

But the two who watched were incapable of giving any answer. They could but stare at the ethereal figment, which to their dazed minds must have appeared as the creation of a nightmare. The face, wrinkled and seared, might have known countless ages. The immense skull, bald and the color of ancient parchment, was surrounded by a thin aureola of white hair. And that Ancient One was watching them; he was talking! Mona La Verne tried to force the scream that would not come from her throat. In the tongue of old Egypt they heard:

"The Gods h a v e meditated and reached a decision. I come only to proclaim it. You, Sakura—you betrayed

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their trust in revealing the past to this wicked woman beside you. You, who were given that greatest of gifts—to know the tomorrows—have proven unworthy of it. For that, no punishment could truly merit justification. And yet the Gods are mindful that you once protected their temple, as well as of your undying love for the dark-eyed maiden, Ivis. So in their wise decision they have tempered mercy with justice.

"For revealing the past to this woman, you are to be returned to it. Yes, you must live again the lives you have known since the hour when you died in yon little hut, far down the Nile. For you, time will be recalled and you must once more know the centuries. Only, this time in every existence, you will be oblivious to both the past and the future. But before you begin your long journey through the ages, I will give you words of comfort: Upon some distant day you will once more know your Ivis. As for the woman beside you, she will continue to be punished throughout the centuries!"

He turned and gestured to the small hut.

"Haste, then, my son," he went on. "For the past has been recalled and at this instant you are dying in yon hut. Your earthly shell, therefore, is the same now as then. But you will discard it here, for one cannot return to the past in the strange garments of today. To the ancient Karamus, who watches over you in yon structure, you will merely disappear. Haste, then, Sakura! Hurry—death frowns on delay!"

Mona La Verne was the lone witness to that which followed. In that weird glow she saw the body of Allen Bedford Marshall become erect and rigid. She caught a glimpse of the agony on his face as he stepped back, then attempted to turn away from that which was before him. She heard his frantic: "No, no, no! Oh, Isis—grant me mercy!"

And then the fear-crazed Mona Le Verne finally found her voice and screamed. She screamed loud and wildly till her shrieks aroused the slumbering butler, Hendricks. But, as though fascinated, she could not take her eyes from that which was transpiring before her, even though she finally reached the wall behind her and was flattened against it. She heard the agonizing groan issue from the lips of Marshall, whose body was now writhing frantically in paroxysms of torture, his arms half outflung as though in mute appeal.

And in that final moment, the screaming Mona La Verne beheld that which snapped her reason. For the body of Allen Bedford Marshall suddenly went limp, then collapsed at the very feet of the watching, Ancient One. And she saw what appeared as a white, misty, indescribable something, rise up and leave the body, float into the picture, then down towards and through the open doorway of the little hut beside the river that sparkled in the moonlight.

The door closed; the Ancient One smiled and nodded an approval. From somewhere she heard what sounded as the lonely cry of a far-off night bird. Then the scene disappeared with the quickness of thought, as the same instant the hurrying Hendricks burst into the room!

DETECTIVE PATRICK MICHael O'Grady loves to reminisce. It's a small mania with him. Have him up to your house some time. Get him in a comfortable chair, put half a dozen bottles of beer beside him, a cigar in his mouth, a flock of cheese sandwiches — preferably limburger —

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within reach, and you have a guest who'll make his departure around the time the milkman arrives. And he'll invariably end up with:

"But of all the screwy cases I ever ran across, that Marshall—Mona La Verne case takes the cake! From what we can make out, they met at his place that night to pitch a little woo. Well, the butler Hendricks, phones us and we hurry over and what do we find? The La Verne dame is stark, ravin' nuts. They have her in a sanitarium today, somewhere up state, but the Docs say she's hopeless—screaming and yelling, then every once in a while coming out with a flow of words none of 'em can understand; though Professor Fleming says something about it sounding a bit like Egyptian. But we've checked and learned she never knew any language other than English.

"And Marshall? There just wasn't any Marshall! A few scattered bones were lying in the clothes the butler said were his, and a skull was on the floor nearby. I could see the coroner was puzzled. He goes and calls in one of those pale—paleon—, oh, you know; one of those guys that study bones. And when I ask him how long he figures Marshall has been dead, the guy gets up, turns to me and says:

"How long has he been dead, Detective O'Grady? Well, judging from those bones there, I'd say about five thousand years!"

—THE END—

COSMIC CREATION

By J. R. Canfield

THIS story could easily be called the "Mystery of the Cosmic Ray." It contains certainly all the drama and romance of any tale or occurrence we have ever known. Even more moving, however, is the newer story that will someday be told about the true meaning of its discovery.

This tale began in 1901. The x-rays and radium had only recently startled the scientific world with their evidence of a new sub-atomic world undreamed of by the cocksure scientists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Professor Wilhelm Konrad Roentgen and Pierre and Marie Curie in their respective discoveries had shocked the world out of its lethargic complacency in assuming, as one great physicist pointed out, that all the great epoch-making discoveries in the field of physics had been made and that the physicist of the future would be concerned largely with repeating and refining the experiments of the past.

Well, the bottom had been knocked out of this idea, and scientists all over the world were eagerly searching for an explanation of these new phenomena. A British scientist, Professor T. R. Wilson of Cambridge, and others had found in the course of their studies of these radiations that an electric charge in an electroscope, even when tightly sealed up in a case, somehow leaked out. This was the tiny clue avidly snatched at and pursued relentlessly to its source that brought forth one of the greatest discoveries in the history of physics.

Professor Wilson bent all his efforts toward finding an explanation of this problem. After long consideration he decided that it could be caused by the presence of radium or some other radio-active substance. A little radium is present almost everywhere, and the smallest amount would send out gamma rays which would in turn create ions. These ions would neutralize the charge on the electroscope and cause the gold leaves to collapse.

Sir Ernest Rutherford, who was then working in Canada, and Dr. S. S. McLeonard, of the University of Toronto, became interested in the subject of the natural discharge of the electroscope and decided to carry out other experiments which might explain the mysterious leakage of the instrument. They surrounded a charged electroscope with 300 pounds of lead so that no radio-active rays might reach it. They then transported it in the winter to the middle of the frozen surface of Lake Ontario so that it would be free from any influence from radium in the soil. It was all to no avail. The electroscope still discharged its electricity.

In Paris another scientist, Professor Theodore Wulff, who was a Jesuit priest, took his instrument to the Eiffel Tower and checked its reaction there. He knew that gamma rays were absorbed by passing through even a relatively thin layer

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of air so that its effect on the electroscope should be decidedly less—if it were the cause. The effect was less, but not nearly as much less as the physicists expected.

In 1910 and 1911 Professor Gockel, a Swiss investigator, went aloft in balloons to make observations. His reports showed that while the rays were indeed weaker at first, they grew stronger as he rose. Dr. Victor F. Hess sent up unmanned balloons with automatic instruments to heights of over 16,000 feet and discovered that the rays were very strong there. In 1912 further experiments in his balloon runs showed that the intensity of the rays grew remarkably as he went aloft, reaching several times larger values at four miles than at the surface of the earth. The conclusion that Dr. Hess came to seemed self-evident. There were rays from outer space which constantly bombarded the earth and they were far more powerful than the x-rays or gamma rays of radium!

This startling conclusion was thrust upon a scientific world that had not quite recovered from the shock of the powerful discoveries of Roentgen and the Curies. They knew that x-rays could pass through ordinary matter and gamma rays were even more penetrating. The theory that there existed even more powerful and piercing rays than these seemed preposterous.

It was left to Dr. Robert A. Millikan to test finally and conclusively this great mystery of cosmic radiation. His early preparation for this scientific cross-examination was interrupted by his service in the scientific corps of the army in the first World War. In 1922 he was able to renew his efforts and together with S. Bowen proceeded to Kelly Field, Texas, for the important experiment.

To the sounding balloons which were to be used, they attached a specially consructed recording machine. It was a marvel of ingenuity. Although it held 300 cubic centimeters of air at 150 pounds pressure, a barometer, thermometer, electroscope, three sets of motion picture films, and a driving mechanism, it weighed only seven ounces.

This apparatus ascended a distance of almost ten miles or nine-tenths of the earth's atmosphere. The recordings made during the flight proved finally and conclusively the existence of these powerful rays. They proved that the cosmic rays are much stronger than gamma rays and that they come from somewhere in outer space.

In 1925 Dr. Millikan completed his final set of experiments on the penetrating power of these new rays. With Dr. Russell Otis he carried 300 pounds of lead and a tank of water to the top of Pike's Peak. He went also with G. Harvey Cameron to Mount Whitney, the highest peak in the country. There at an elevation of 11,800 feet, Millikan sank his instruments to various depths of Muir Lake. At a spot 60 feet below the surface of the lake an area was found where the "electricity thief" could not penetrate. Subsequent experiments at Gem Lake in California and at Lake Constance in Switzerland showed that the rays vary in length, and the shortest ones are capable of penetrating 350 feet of water, an equivalent of 30 feet of lead; and that they are continually bombarding the earth from all sides.

One more extremely important phenomenon should be mentioned here. Modern physicists have noted that atoms, when they combine to form an element, weigh less in combination than the total of their combined weights. One atom of hydrogen, for example, consisting of one electron and one proton, has an atomic weight of 1,-077. An atom of helium consists of four hydrogen atoms and therefore should weigh four times as much or 4.308. The amazing thing is that helium atoms weigh exactly four; a loss of .308 occurs somehow, and very mysteriously at that. It is technically known as the "packing fraction."

This loss of mass seems to run contrary to the fundamental concept of physics, the indestructibility of matter. Relativity explains it, however, as being due to the conversion of part of the substance to radiant energy. Millikan argues that this conversion of the lighter elements into heavier elements and the subsequent conversion of part of the substance into radiant energy accounts for these powerful cosmic rays.

What does this thesis imply? To Dr. Millikan it presents the theoretical possibility that in the vast interstellar space that to human eyes seems empty and limitless, there is occurring this constant building of heavier elements, elements combining together to form new worlds. Such a process has often been suggested in order to allow the Creator to continue on his job. New planets are being born even as ours grows older in the never-ending process of creation. Dr. Millikan points out that though there are certainly only a small number of experimental fingerprints pointing in that direction, it is a thesis which may yet be verified by the hopeful scientist of the future.

—THE END—

COMING NEXT MONTH

TAMING OF THE TYRANT

BY LEROY YERXA

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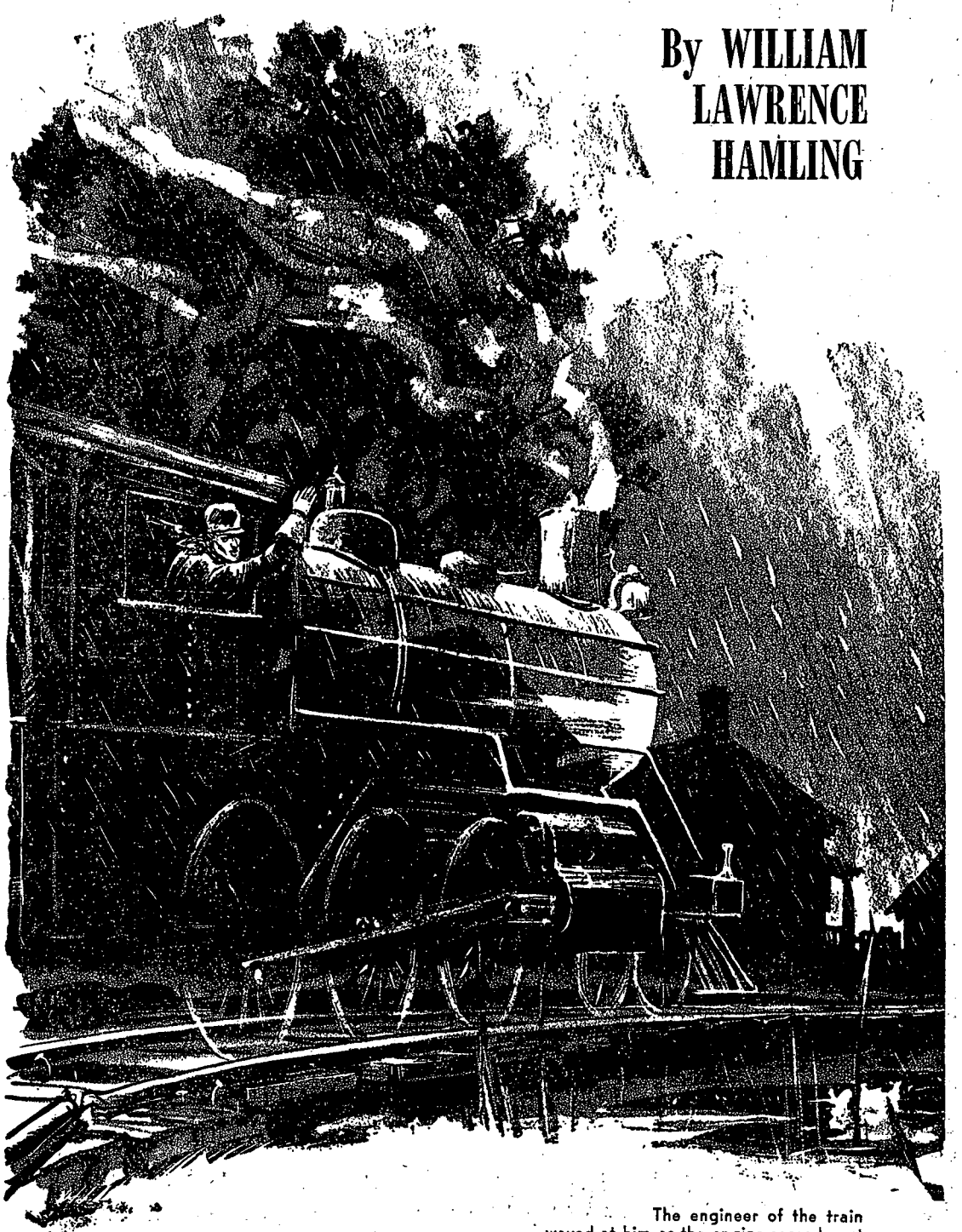
JIMMY TAKES A TRIP

By WILLIAM LAWRENCE HAMLING



The engineer of the train waved at him as the engine roared past

Jimmy liked to watch the train go through the old station—and one day it stopped, so he took a ride . . . !

"JIMMY, you are not paying attention to your class work!" Miss Madison, fifth grade teacher of the Athens Grammar School, gazed reprovingly from behind her large walnut desk at the almost expressionless features of the boy seated at the head of the first aisle.

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"Jimmy, do you hear me?"

The boy, a slim blond-haired lad of ten years, started as the words reached his ears. He fumbled with the reader that lay open upon his desk and looked up at his teacher with shy wistful eyes.

"I—I'm sorry, Miss Madison—— I was thinking . . ."

There was a titter of laughter from the other pupils. It faded abruptly as the teacher's eyes swept over the class. Then she looked back at Jimmy. A frown crossed her face.

"We've been waiting for you to read your lesson, Jimmy. What is so important that you can forget your assignment?"

The boy lowered his eyes shyly. "I— I was thinking about trains . . . I like trains."

Miss Madison gazed for a long moment at the boy. It was a funny thing, she thought. Jimmy Brent was usually such a bright, attentive pupil. He could easily be at the head of his class if he wanted to, and there was no reason why he shouldn't be. Lately this business about trains was not exactly new. It was usually about this time of the afternoon, just before class let out for the day, that she caught that funny expression on the boy's face. And always it was the same thing—he was thinking about trains.

"You will have all the time you want after school to think about trains, Jimmy. Right now you have a lesson to read."

Jimmy got to his feet hastily, his little round face a dull, embarrassed red. He began to read the lesson.

"LET'S play hide and seek!"

"No, let's play tag!"

"We played tag yesterday."

"Okay, we'll play hide and seek today."

Jimmy Brent followed the group of boys from the schoolyard. They were laughing and talking in happy abandon, now that school was over for another day.

"Where'll we play?" one of the boys asked.

Jimmy wedged his way to the front of the group.

"Let's play down at the old depot," he said excitedly.

"Aw, we played tag there yesterday. You always want to play by those old tracks."

"What's the matter with the depot?" Jimmy argued. "There's a lot of places to hide down there."

One of the other boys chimed in. "Oh, what difference does it make! Let's play at the depot today."

Jimmy's face was happy with a hidden gladness. They were going to play by the depot. Down by the old deserted tracks. Down by the trains, the trains of yesteryear.

He followed gaily, his little round face suffused with excitement. He didn't talk much as they went, and some of the boys looked at him with small frowns. There were some things they didn't understand about Jimmy.

"There it is!" one of the boys chirped.

There it was. An old, decrepit building with the Soo Line trade-mark running diagonally across the front. The paint had long since given up against years of storm and snow and sun. Even the wood was cracked in spots, showing gaping crevices of darkness.

Across the side of the depot, weather-beaten and scarcely legible, was the single word—Athens. And beside the squatting loneliness of the building ran the rusted tracks.

The game began. The boys ran to hiding places around the depot, and in the tall grass that grew unchecked along the abandoned freight sidings. It

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was a good place for hide and seek.

Jimmy hid in the old baggage room. But his mind wasn't on the game. Nor was he hidden as well as he could have been. He stood there, in the semi-darkness with the sunlight streaming through intermittent cracks around the boarded window frame, and his little body quivered. There was something about the old depot, some hidden, intangible essence that Jimmy felt. Some thing . . .

"One two three for Jimmy!" A small voice called from the entrance to the baggage room. Jimmy started there in the musty silence. Slowly he walked from the room, out into the sunlight, not trying to beat his playmate to the goal.

"Jimmy, you're it!"

They were all standing around the goal at the side of the depot. They were laughing at the way Jimmy had let himself be caught.

"Don't forget to count to ten before you look for us!" one boy called out. Jimmy nodded and placed his arm against the goal. He put his little face up against it and began to count.

"One, two, three, four—" There with his eyes closed, leaning against the corner of the depot, even as he counted aloud, Jimmy heard it. It was a sound that came from the far distance, from the long forgotten memories of a lonely past. Jimmy's little heart leapt at the sound. He had been waiting for it.

". . . eight, nine, ten."

JIMMY lifted his face from the goal and blinked in the sunlight. The boys were gone, safely hidden, eager to beat him to the goal when he started looking for them. But Jimmy didn't start looking.

There was something else. His small blue eyes gazed fixedly down the winding rusted tracks with the green wild grass sprouting along the ties. A hazy shimmer of heat waves raised from the warm rusty rails . . . danced in kaleidoscopic patterns in the air above.

Jimmy walked slowly toward the center of the depot. Then he stopped. His face grew into a glad little smile, and he was looking up into the air. He saw something there. Something that made his heart beat faster. He waved a small hand, and stood rocking back and forth on his tiny heels.

One by one the boys sneaked from their hiding places. They started to run for the goal, their eyes on Jimmy as he stood there out in front of the depot, staring off into the distance.

They grouped around the goal hollering, "Free!"

But Jimmy didn't hear them.

They moved around him in a small circle of puzzled faces. They saw the smile on Jimmy's face, and his eyes. Eyes that didn't see them.

"Jimmy! What's the matter? Aren't you playing anymore?"

"Huh?" Jimmy seemed to jump as if he had just been awakened from some wonderful dream. "What did you say?"

The boys looked at him. One of them waved a small hand mockingly at Jimmy. "Oh, I know. You're thinking about those trains again!"

Jimmy nodded vigorously. "Yes—I was just talking to the engineer! Wasn't that a beautiful train?"

The boys looked up and down the tracks.

"There's no train here. There never was a train here."

Jimmy flushed angrily. "There was so. You were all hiding. But I saw it, and I talked to the engineer. He's a nice white bearded man . . ."

The boys began laughing. They joined hands and ran around Jimmy in a wide circle, laughing and shouting.

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"Jimmy is crazy! Jimmy is crazy!"

"I am not crazy!" Jimmy was very close to tears. His face was flushed with red embarrassment and he twisted around as the mocking faces of the boys flew past him in dizzy circles.

"Jimmy's a cry-baby!" one of the boys shouted.

All of the pent-up emotion that was inside of Jimmy burst out. Tears rolled down his face. Tears of anger. "I am not a cry-baby! And there is so a train! I did see it! And I did talk to the engineer!"

Sharp boisterous laughter, met him. The boys stopped their dancing around him and stood off shaking fingers at him.

"Jimmy sees trains! Jimmy sees trains that aren't there!"

Jimmy clenched his fists. He wanted to run into them, beat his fists into their laughing faces, wipe that taunting mockery away. But he didn't.

He turned his back and ran off down the tracks. Behind him the boys redoubled their shouts. Jimmy ran.

"HERE he comes now, John." Mrs. John Brent glanced across the dining room table at her husband, and there was relief on her features. John Brent arose and hurried into the front hall.

Jimmy was closing the front door. He turned and saw his mother standing there, a frown on her face.

"Jimmy! Where have you been? Your father and I have been worried half to death. Do you know what time it is?"

Jimmy brushed a small hand wearily across his face. There were traces of tears etched in dusty lines down the sides of his cheeks.

"I—I've been out walking, mother."

"Jimmy!" John Brent called gruffly from the dining room. Mrs. Brent took Jimmy's hand and led him into the dining room. She knew the boy's father was angry. She had been too. But her anger was gone now that Jimmy had come home. She knew John wouldn't forgive so easily.

"Yes, dad."

John Brent looked at his son sternly. "Young man, what's the meaning of coming home at this hour!"

Jimmy looked at the dining room window before he let his eyes meet those of his father. He could see the dusk thickening outside. It was very close to seven.

"I'm waiting, Jimmy!"

"I was out playing with the boys down at the depot . . ."

"Oh?" John Brent's eyebrows rose questioningly. "And you've been playing all this time?"

"No." Jimmy answered lowering his eyes. "The boys were making fun of me and I left them."

"Making fun of you?" The stern tone left John Brent's voice. "What do you mean, Jimmy?"

"They didn't see the train," Jimmy replied sullenly.

"Train? What train?" John Brent found himself losing all the reprimand he had told himself the boy needed. There was something strange about this.

"The train down at the depot. I like to see it—and the engineer is always so nice to me . . ."

Train. The old depot. Engineer. John Brent sat back in his chair and looked up at his wife. He saw the same message in her eyes. *There hadn't been a train in Athens for the past ten years!*

Suddenly he laughed. "Of course, I understand, Jimmy. You've been playing a game. Naturally the other boys couldn't see the train! But you must promise you won't stay out so

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late playing anymore—now go upstairs and wash for supper."

Jimmy thrust out his lower lip and shook his head stubbornly. "It was not a game! They didn't see it because they were hiding! But I did—I see it lots of times . . . They laugh at me."

He turned and ran from the room. His mother sat down at the table and looked at her husband with a frown.

"John, I'm worried."

John Brent looked up from his food. "There's nothing to worry about. He's just in that imaginative age. Why I remember when I was a kid I used to think about dragons and rot like that. If you ask me, Jimmy is being a lot more practical dreaming about trains!"

"But he is so serious about it—"

"Bosh. He'll forget about it in a day or so, something new will attract him. I tell you he's just in that age!"

John Brent returned to his meal.

JIMMY'S eyes were on the big clock over Miss Madison's desk. He was looking at it with a far off stare. It was nearly three o'clock, and soon school would be out and he could go down to the depot.

"Jimmy!"

Miss Madison's voice cut in on the boy's thoughts. Jimmy straightened in his seat and looked guiltily at the teacher.

"Jimmy, this is the second time I've had to call you this afternoon! Why aren't you paying attention?"

Jimmy lowered his gaze and studied the open speller on his desk. What good would it do him to tell her anything, she would just laugh like the rest, or maybe get mad . . .

"Trains!" someone piped from the back of the room. The rest of the pupils picked it up laughingly. "Trains! Choo-choo! Trains!"

"Children!" Miss Madison got up from her chair and walked around to the front of the desk. The pupils quieted down but small titters of amusement still sounded.

Miss Madison looked at Jimmy with puzzled eyes. This was going a lot further than she had suspected. Even the rest of the children were singling him out. And a bright boy like Jimmy would not be able to take derision. She had to stop it.

"Jimmy, I want to see you after school this afternoon."

Jimmy nodded sheepishly and kept his gaze from the other pupils. He could feel the laughter and mockery burning into his back. For the first time, Jimmy really felt the utter loneliness of being an outcast.

"Yes, Miss Madison," he said softly.

The teacher turned back to her desk, and the three o'clock bell rang.

THEY were alone in the classroom, the two of them. Miss Madison sat behind her desk and Jimmy stood mutely before her, his hands clasped awkwardly behind his back.

"Jimmy, I kept you after school today because I wanted to have a talk with you. Do you mind?"

He looked up at her, saw the honest sincereness of her smile, and suddenly wasn't awkward anymore. He released his clasped fingers and shook his head. "No I don't mind, Miss Madison."

"That's fine, Jimmy, because I want you to know that I'm not trying to punish you." She paused briefly. "I really want to help you Jimmy, and I know that something is bothering you. Now tell me what it is."

Jimmy felt the old embarrassment creeping over him again. And he didn't understand why he should feel that way. There was no reason why he

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should be afraid to talk about it, but others didn't understand . . .

"Is it what the other pupils said, Jimmy? Is it about the trains?"

Slowly he raised his eyes. He nodded.

Miss Madison reached out her hand and took the boy by the arm. Reluctantly he approached. She smiled.

"Well I think it is a perfectly natural desire to want to know about trains, Jimmy. Everybody likes trains, why I go for a trip on one every summer during my vacation. Just what is it about trains that bothers you, Jimmy?"

His wide blue eyes were all aglitter with interest. She had said she rode on trains. She liked trains. She would understand

"I—I like to watch the train down at the old depot," he blurted out. "And —and the rest of the boys tell me I'm crazy!"

Miss Madison didn't allow the smile to fade from her face. She knew enough about child psychology to know that young minds must be handled delicately, like fragile pieces of art. She also knew that there hadn't been a train in Athens for ten years. There were buses, but no trains.

"What is this train like, Jimmy?" She watched the eager flush that was spreading over his round little face.

"I—I can't describe it, Miss Madison —but it's a beautiful train—much nicer than the ones in our books—and the engineer . . ."

"Oh, you have seen him?" she asked.

"Yes—he even talks to me. He sits way up there and always talks to me."

"What does he look like, Jimmy?"

The boy frowned. "I don't know, really—but he has nice white hair, and I can't see much of him."

"And the other boys, they don't see the train?"

"No." Some of the old feeling came back to him. He thought of the jeers his classmates gave him, how they avoided him. Suddenly he looked up at the teacher with wide hopeful eyes.

"Miss Madison, you don't think I'm crazy, do you?"

She slipped her arm around his shoulder. "Of course not, Jimmy. And to show you how much I like trains I'm going to walk down to the depot with you this afternoon. That is, if you don't mind letting me see it too."

His eyes glowed with boyish delight. "Gee, gosh, no, Miss Madison!"

She rose from her desk and went to the coat room. With her back to Jimmy, the smile faded from her face. Somehow, she felt, this problem was going to be too big for her.

IT STOOD there as always, old decrepit and rundown. The afternoon sun beat down in warm waves of dancing radiance. And it was quiet.

Jimmy walked out on the warped and rotted platform, his face a wreath of pleasure. Beside him, Miss Madison walked along.

"It's right about here, Miss Madison," he announced. "I stand here every day and wait. It won't be long now."

She smiled down on him and nodded her head. "Then we'll wait here."

They waited. And gradually the pleasure faded from Jimmy's face. Disappointment was a tired ache showing in his eyes. They had been standing there, amid the dancing heat waves rolling over the lonely vista of track, for over an hour.

"I—I don't understand, Miss Madison. He's never been late before . . ."

It might have been the heat. It might have been the fatigue of standing motionless on a long deserted depot platform with an imaginative child. It might have been sheer impatience. Miss Madison wasn't quite sure. But she

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suddenly decided that the boy was either playing a prank on her or was stretching his imagination too far.

"Jimmy," she said, and her voice had a new reprimanding tone, "I think we've waited here long enough, and I also think this whole story has gone far enough. I want you to promise me that you will drop all this train business. Why don't you go and play with the rest of the boys at games you can all understand? This pretending about seeing trains and talking to engineers is going too far!" She paused, watching him closely, then added, "If you promise, I'll forget about the whole thing, and I won't have to mention it to your parents."

He looked up at her. All the gladness that had been inside him, flowed out, leaving him lonely and hurt. There were traces of tears in his eyes.

"You—you don't believe me either—you are like all the rest—I thought you would understand . . ."

"Will you promise, Jimmy?" she asked him more sternly.

He shook his head savagely, and the tears dropped from his misty blue eyes. "No! No!"

"Jimmy!"

He turned and ran. As fast as his little legs would travel, he ran along the grass covered ties.

"Jimmy! Come back here!" The teacher called sharply, but he kept on running. Into the tall grass beside the tracks and out of sight.

She sighed heavily and turned away from the depot. Her face was set in a worried frown. It was a bigger problem than she had thought it would be. Something would have to be done.

JOHN BRENT left work early that afternoon. He arrived home thinking about the phone call he had received from Miss Madison a short time before. She had told him the whole story and he had promised to take the boy in hand. His wife met him at the door.

"John, I'm glad you're home. When you called me I tried to reason with him, but he just sits in his room and sulks. I'm afraid something is wrong with him." Worried concern showed in her features.

"There's something wrong with him all right," John Brent replied, "but nothing that a good licking won't cure!"

Mrs. Brent shook her head. "You're wrong, John. It goes deeper than that. He has a fixation about these trains, and I'm afraid it's going to affect his health. Maybe we should consult Dr. Borden . . ."

"I'll get to the bottom of this, don't worry." He headed for the stairs.

"John, be reasonable with him. Remember he's only a child."

He grunted and walked upstairs.

Jimmy was sitting by the window in his room, looking out into the waning afternoon. He could see off across the fields behind the house to where he knew the depot rested down behind the woods. His chin was cupped between his hands as he gazed out the window. His face was wistful, lonely. He heard his father enter.

"Jimmy." John Brent sat down on the bed and motioned to his son.

"Yes, dad."

"Come over here, I want to talk with you."

Jimmy walked slowly over to the bed and gazed up at his father. John Brent noticed the look on the boy's face.

"Jimmy, Miss Madison called me on the telephone this afternoon."

"Yes, dad."

John Brent sighed and started on a new tack. "Look here, son, I'm afraid you don't realize just how much harm

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your imagination is doing, not only to yourself, but to your mother and me. Don't you think it's about time you quit playing make believe?"

The wide blue eyes were close to brimming. The wistful ache in them was deep and painful. Words choked out from Jimmy's mouth.

"I'm not playing anything. I don't understand why everybody laughs at me. They all say I'm crazy—even Miss Madison thinks so—and just because I like to watch the train—"

"Jimmy! There is no train, there hasn't been a train for ten years!" John Brent hated to use those words, but he saw no way out.

"There is so," Jimmy replied stubbornly. "We just didn't wait long enough this afternoon. She would have seen it, but she didn't want to wait."

John Brent looked for long silent moments at his son. Something that he hadn't considered as a possibility suddenly dawned on him as actual fact. *Jimmy was serious—he really believed there was a train!*

"Come with me, Jimmy." John Brent got up from the bed. He walked to the door and waited.

"Where are we going, dad?"

"To the depot, Jimmy. You and I are going to see this train."

DOWN over the edge of the pastures stretching off like machined patches of greens and blues, the sun slowly sank. The shadows began to lengthen around the depot, a long eerie phantasm of ancient wood. In front of the depot, looking off into the settling dusk, Jimmy stood, his small feet braced wide apart on the rickety platform. His father stood close beside him, watching.

Jimmy stared upward. He was oblivious of his father's presence. He seemed to sense something, waiting there. The expression on his face, the blankness of his eyes. To John Brent it seemed almost as if the boy were on the verge of some ephemeral trance.

Suddenly Jimmy raised his hand excitedly. He pointed off in the distance down the tracks. John Brent followed his son's gaze.

He saw nothing.

He looked down at the boy. Jimmy's face was a rapt expression of joy. His features seemed to glow in the rays of the fading sunlight. His voice came in a tiny almost inaudible whisper.

"See it, dad! There it is—see it!"

John Brent felt himself grow cold inside. Standing there, looking at the awed, tense expression on his son's face, made his throat tighten.

"Jimmy!" he cried out and shook the boy vigorously with both hands.

The raptness left Jimmy's face. He looked up at his father with a frown.

"What's the matter, dad? You did see it, didn't you?"

John Brent was torn up inside. All his self-assurance had been shattered into little pieces. He looked down at the earnest, sincere little face peering up at him and all he could say was, "Yes, Jimmy, I saw it . . . Let's go home now."

THEY saw Dr. Borden the following afternoon. John Brent sat silently by with his wife while the Doctor plied Jimmy with questions. The boy was calm, but emphatic about the whole thing. He saw the train, he talked to the engineer, and his dad said he had seen it too. The Doctor didn't contradict him, but waited until Jimmy had been sent into the outer office. He then faced the two anxious parents.

"Doctor, what do you think?" John Brent fumbled with a cigar.

"Don't worry too much, John," Dr. Borden replied. "It is my opinion that

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Jimmy is mentally sound and physically fit. He just has a fixation which is responsible more to his age than anything else. I'd advise humoring him along until he gets tired of the whole thing. And he will tire of it soon.

"The juvenile mind is highly imaginative. All of us go through that stage at one time or another; possibly not to such an extent as Jimmy, but I believe it is entirely harmless. I'd suggest bringing him back in a few weeks, but in the meantime let him work this out for himself."

JIMMY didn't tire of it.

As the days passed, he grew more intense on the subject. He talked only about the train, about the engineer. His grades went down in school, the children shunned him. When they did talk to him it was only to shout: "Jimmy's crazy! Jimmy's crazy!"

His parents felt the strain. Their nerves were running short. They had tried to follow Dr. Borden's advice. *Humor him. Let him work it out. He will tire of it.*

Jimmy didn't tire of it.

They were very tired.

. . . Clouds covered the sky one afternoon, and Jimmy came home early. His mother met him at the door and saw the smile of pleasure that covered his features.

"Why are you home so early, Jimmy? Aren't you out playing today?"

"I talked to him, Mom, I talked to him—and he invited me!"

Mrs. Brent frowned. "What on earth are you talking about, Jimmy?"

"The engineer, Mom! He asked me if I'd like to go on a trip with him! He asked me!"

"A trip!" Mrs. Brent felt her face grow white. Jimmy ran past her and up the front stairway to his room. She heard his voice echo down.

"I've got to get dressed, Mom!"

Mrs. Brent passed a hand wearily over her forehead. This was too much. She wanted to cry. She wanted to scold him. She wanted to stop it.

She ran to the phone. Her husband swore angrily. He said he'd be right home.

Jimmy came prancing down the stairs.

"I'm all ready, Mom. Do I look all right?"

Mrs. Brent grabbed him roughly by the arm. She shook him. She shook him until tears rolled down his face. Then she hustled him up to his room and shut the door. She told him his father was coming home. She told him to take off his good clothes. She went downstairs to wait.

Jimmy didn't wait.

He stood sobbing in his room for a few moments. All the world, the whole big laughing world was against him. They all thought he was crazy—even the two people he counted on most, his parents.

He should have obeyed his mother. He should have taken off his clothes and waited for his father.

Jimmy did neither of those things.

He opened the door softly. He could hear his mother moving around downstairs. He moved quietly along the hall, crept down the stairs, and paused at the bottom. His mother was in the kitchen.

Slowly he opened the front door, and was gone.

Out in the street some of the boys were playing. They saw Jimmy in his best clothes walking along the street. They tagged after him.

"Where are you going all dressed up, Jimmy?"

Jimmy looked at them scornfully. "I'm going on a trip!"

"Where to? What kind of a trip?"

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"I'm going with the engineer!"

They talked in low whispers behind him. Then they started to dance around him shouting: "Jimmy's crazy! Jimmy's crazy!"

Jimmy didn't mind. He'd show them. *They* hadn't been asked along.

DOWN the street, across the clover fields, through the small wooded glen at the outskirts of town. Then the depot.

Jimmy never paused. And the boys tagged after him, laughing, jeering. Jimmy didn't mind.

Something rolled ominously in the clouds overhead. Deep, distant rolling of thunder. Jimmy stood on the station platform and felt the first few drops of rain touch his face.

"It's going to storm!" one of the boys cried out.

They turned to run for home. One of them pointed to the road winding up behind the depot.

"Look, there comes Jimmy's father!"

John Brent was running down the road. He saw the boys grouped off to the side of the depot. He saw Jimmy standing on the platform. He was out of breath, angry, frightened.

"Jimmy! Jimmy!" he called.

His words were drowned out in a roll of thunder. A bright flash of lightning split the heavens. He saw Jimmy's face raised, looking off in the distance. A hazy, shimmering halo of light seemed to dance around him. He called again.

"Jimmy! Jimmy!"

The boys started to run. The storm was breaking. But Jimmy didn't hear the words. He was smiling. And then his little hand was waving in the air.

John Brent was almost to the depot. A few more steps.

Another flash of lightning split the sky. It lanced down in a silver streak of fire. John Brent hid his eyes. The roaring crash of thunder deafened him.

Then there was silence. Silence and the *pit-pat* of rain.

He looked at the depot platform. Behind him the boys were looking too. And John Brent heard them cry out in fear.

He couldn't cry out. He stood transfixed, staring.

Jimmy was gone.

Jimmy was gone! The words screeched through his brain. He felt himself trembling.

And then there was something else. Something that came out of the *pit-pat* falling of the rain.

It wasn't thunder.

It was the low, mournful wail of a train whistle, fading into the distance.

THE END

TAKE A SUGGESTION, MISS FITT

By CARTER T. WAINWRIGHT

OVER one hundred and fifty years ago, a very learned man stumbled on the secret of hypnotism which he hoped to use to bring about astonishing medical cures. He was not aware of the danger or the scope of the art, but was fully convinced that the unusual power was a form of magnetic energy derived from the stars and planets. The man was Friedrich Anton Mesmer and he lived during the eighteenth century.

Mesmer had amassed a varied fund of knowledge as a boy. He was very studious and loved nature. Hoping to enter the priesthood, he learned Latin and French. Changing his mind about his life work, he found that the study of music and philosophy intrigued him. A doctorate degree in philosophy still left him dissatisfied, and for a short time he studied law. Then Mesmer decided

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to be a physician, subordinating his musical interests to anatomy and botany. Everything interested him—geology, physics and chemistry, as well as mathematics. All his serious scientific studies suddenly took a mystical twist and he became absorbed in the idea that the planets somehow influenced the human body.

His theory was slightly out of key to the time in which he lived. Science was just emerging from darkness, as it were, and men were inclined to believe less and less in the supernatural magic meaning of things, and more in the natural causes which could be observed. Mesmer's theories were still steeped in the world of astrology and alchemy, a world which was rapidly being forsaken for the new.

Mesmer's first view of magnetism at work was gained from a modest Jesuit priest who had been attracting the curious because of his successful treatment of nervous patients. Patients were heard to exclaim that they actually could feel the magnet drawing the pain out of their body. Mesmer toyed with the idea, studied what was then known about the planets and the stars, and tried to establish a physical relationship between the two. His successful treatment of Fraulein Franzl Oesterlin encouraged him to continue his work along these lines.

Franzl Oesterlin was a woman of twenty-eight who suffered from nervous attacks, lasting a few days, which defied all known methods of treatment. The attacks started most often with an earache, then fever, terrifying convulsions, hallucinations, paralysis, and pains in the legs which came in rapid succession. When Mesmer came to treat her, she lay stretched out in bed unable to move for fear that her spasms of pain would return. He placed a magnet over each foot and another around her neck, and waited with his hand on her pulse. Nothing happened for a few moments. Then when Mesmer touched the magnets to assure himself that they were in the proper position, a pain shot along her legs and seemed to leave her body. Dr. Mesmer was delighted with this first sign of success, and wrote a very careful account of the case giving numerous details of the symptoms and treatment. However, he failed to note the most significant fact, the one which modern physicians are fully aware of—that the suffering woman had absolute confidence in her doctor and professed a belief that he was the only one who could cure her. Mesmer had overlooked the most obvious fact of the experiment and continued to go about with his head in the clouds referring to something which he titled "universal magnetism."

Other doctors were quick to scoff at him, but his theory greatly appealed to the general public. The findings of the physical scientists in the fields of electricity and magnetism were on everyone's tongue. Men were experimenting with electric sparks by rubbing polished metallic surfaces. The fact that the earth itself was a magnet, with a magnetic pole in the North, was known to every schoolboy. Benjamin Franklin's experiment, obtaining electricity from lightning through a key attached o a kite flown in a storm, had been seized upon as a fascinating addition to knowledge.

Although Dr. Mesmer got amazing results in almost every case, he was faced with the obstinate opposition of medical colleagues at every turn. From Vienna, the doctor moved to Paris where he established a very successful practice in a short time. But now his treatments became very elaborate affairs depending more on the supposedly magic surroundings and symbols than on the "physician-patient" relationship. His salon was beautifully decorated with thick carpets and rich tapestries. Music, provided by a concealed band, filled the room in which his patients gathered. There was a great copper container in the center of the room which was supposed to hold magnetic fluid, the substance which was reputed to provide the connecting link between the stars and planets and human beings. The treatment involved a great deal of ceremony and was much like a seance in effect. Mesmer, scoffed at, envied, worshiped, and respected, never denied that he was theatrical and far from medical in his approach. He had only his record of cures to boast of, and an imposing record it was!

Though he made every possible attempt in that direction, Mesmer was never able to convince the revered scientists of his own day that he was anything but a quack. He brooded about his lack of scientific recognition until the day he died, in 1815. After his death, the true influence which he had wielded now made itself evident. Societies sprang up in France and Germany with the sole purpose in mind of studying "animal magnetism." Mesmer had made the world conscious of a principle to which no one had paid attention before; he realized the great personal factor involved in his magnetizing, but did not appreciate its meaning. It remained for the men who followed him to prove the value of what he had hit upon.

In France, the Marquis de Puysegur made the discovery that the force used did not flow from the heavens, but was a force emanating from the magnetizer himself. In 1843, James Braid, an English physician claimed that he could achieve the same effect without the use of magnetic fluid by simply putting the patient to sleep through the repetition of monotonous words. This Englishman called his revision of Mesmer's treatment *neurohypnosis*. It was the prelude to the development of hypnosis which has proved to be an invaluable aid to the psychologist and physician alike.

The medical world is greatly indebted to Friedrich Anton Mesmer, the man who stumbled unwittingly upon the notion of using the remarkable power of mental suggestion for purposes of cure.

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The Softly Silken Wallet

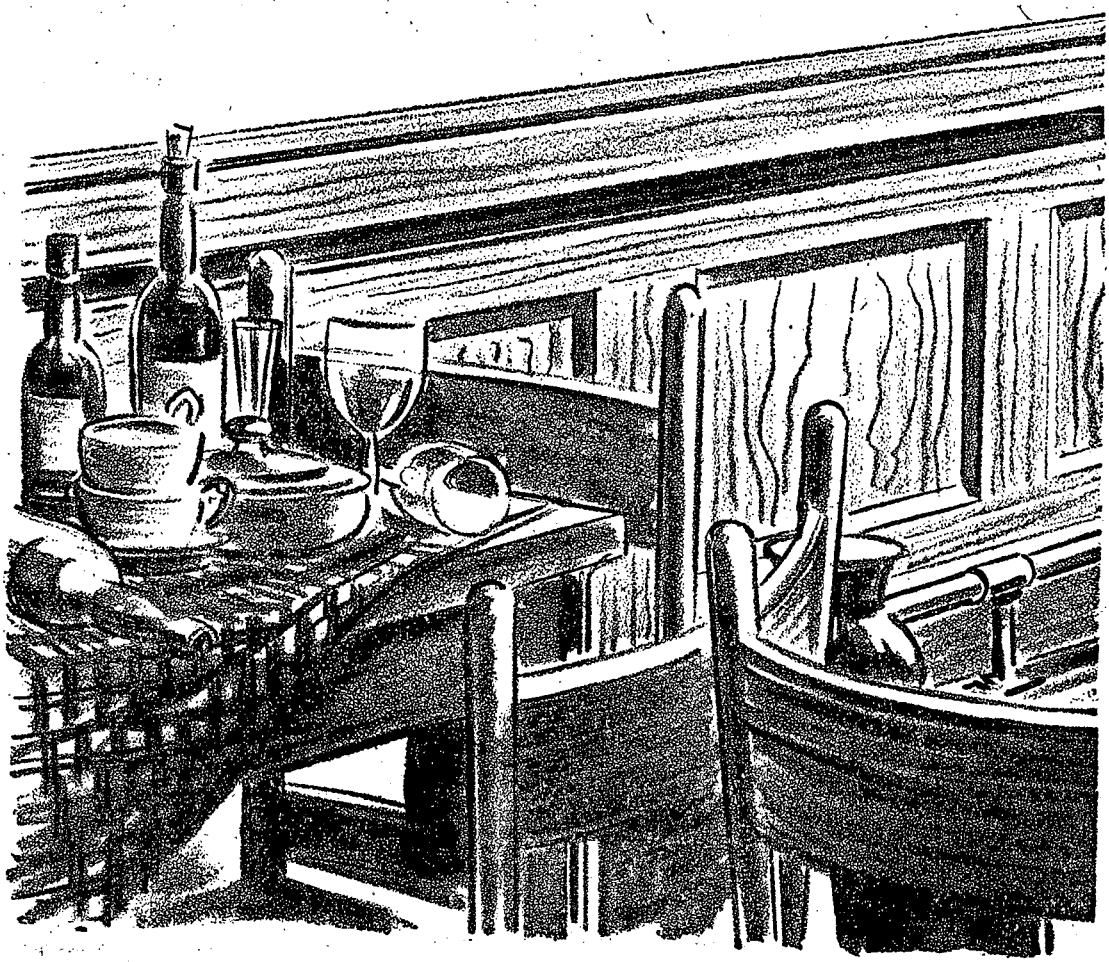
By DAVID WRIGHT O'BRIEN

THE thin, sharp-featured little man standing at the rear of the Elevated platform in the swirling snow that chilling March afternoon, was pleased. His pleasure was evident in the smirk on his thin lips and the glitter in his gimlet eyes as they moved restlessly, appraisingly over the crowds that jammed the station.

Marty Merkin was thinking that, despite the cold and the snow and the crushing jam of passengers waiting on the platform for trains, this was a hell of a good day for business.

On a day like this, he reflected, people were conscious only of their own weariness, discomfort and the immediate problem of forcing their ways through the elevated doors to find seats for the homeward trip.

On days like this, consequently, sharp-eyed pickpockets like little



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The wallet was soft and silky, but there was something very horrible about it, like death . . .

. . . thrust the banknote over his shoulder.

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Marty Merkin were in clover.

An Evanston Special rolled up to a stop, and Marty grinned as he watched the people on the platform surge forward, fighting each other to be first inside the opening doors.

But he didn't move forward to mingle with them and press closely against them. Instead he stood there watching and smiling and taking his time. There was plenty of time, just like there was plenty of fish, he told himself. It was just a matter of standing back and casing the crowd until a really ripe customer happened along.

That big fat guy, Merkin observed, arms full of bundles, was well dressed and obviously in the chips. Yet Marty's long practiced analysis told him unfailingly that the fat guy wouldn't be the sort to carry his dough around in big wads. There'd be maybe ten, maybe fifteen, in the fat guy's wallet. Not enough to bother with on a day like this.

"Day like this," Marty told himself, "I don't settle fer no small stuff."

So he continued to watch the crowd, smirking happily at the prospects he knew to be ahead, taking his time and watching for the right one.

The right one came along less than ten minutes later. He was a tall guy and thin as a beanpole. Marty watched him come out onto the platform, noting that he had musician-length gray hair that came almost to the collar of his thin gabardine topcoat. This right one was middle-aged, Marty saw, with a long, lean, horse-like face and deep, sunken gray eyes.

He was carrying a large instrument case, which Marty judged to contain a cello or some stringed instrument similar in size and shape. That was, of course, the absolute confirmation of Marty's judgment that the guy was a musician.

The thin, beanpole-ish guy stood there on the platform, the wind and swirling snow flapping his topcoat grotesquely against his thin shanks and gaunt frame.

Marty couldn't restrain a grin, as a gust of wind caught the man from the rear and outlined, momentarily, the bulky block of a wallet in his right hip pocket.

That was double confirmation for Marty. Confirmation that these musician guys were the type to carry most of their wad with them, and to be very careless about it. He wet his thin lips in anticipation, and moved forward until he was less than four feet behind the musician.

A RAVENSWOOD Express rolled into the station at that moment, and the tall, gaunt, horse-faced musician began to move forward to push with the crowds toward the door.

Marty stepped up directly behind the fellow, pressing hard against him, as if he too were trying to push for a seat on the Ravenswood Express. Several other passengers pushed in behind Marty, which increased the surging pressure and pleased Marty additionally.

The beanpole-ish musician was having a time of it with his big cello case. He had to hang onto it with both hands, and turn it from side to side to keep the crowds from damaging it. This was an additional boon to Marty, though he scarcely needed it.

It was really almost too simple to take. Marty felt what almost amounted to a twinge of guilt as he flipped open the razor sharp blade of his pocket knife.

In the half dozen steps remaining to the door of the elevated train, Marty expertly slit through the topcoat, slipped his hand inside the rent, and removed the fat wallet from the musician's hip

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pocket.

In half a minute more, Marty had eased out through the crowds until he was on the back of the platform. He slipped the wallet into his own pocket and hid the knife in his sleeve in these brief seconds. And now he turned to glance at the train door, where the big scarecrow with the cello case was just moving through the door.

He was the last one on the car as the doors slid shut. And Marty saw the sudden, startled expression on the gaunt guy's face as he turned to face the window. The scarecrow had taken one hand from his cello, and was groping with the other at the rent in the back of his topcoat.

Marty saw all this in a glance, and smirked as the train began to roll.

The last glimpse he had of the musician guy was his expression of surprise and stricken dismay as he became aware of his loss.

Marty moved nimbly through the crowd to the regular exit, lost himself in the comforting numbers, and was down on Wabash Avenue a few moments later.

He walked briskly along for several blocks, moving south toward the section of cheap bars and restaurants, flophouses and salvation missions that comprised the district on that border of the Loop.

After three blocks he stopped casually before the large plate window of an antique shop. He looked easily to his left, the direction from which any possible pursuit might come. He knew he had cleared himself neatly, but habit made him careful. As he had figured, there was no pursuit.

He snapped the razor keen pocket knife shut, dropped it from his sleeve into his pocket. Then, putting his other hand into the pocket of his overcoat, he felt the fat, promising bulk of the smooth leather wallet.

He had to laugh. It had been a breeze.

MARTY moved on, then turned a corner after several blocks more and abruptly entered a small, beer-reeking tavern with dirty windows and dirtier customers inside.

He nodded casually to several of his acquaintances as he moved along the bar. Then he found an untenanted booth in the rear, and sat down to see what his profits were.

He made no secretive pretense about examining the wallet after he had placed it on the table before him. Such hypocrisy was quite unnecessary in this particular den of thieves.

A barkeep came up to the table, just as Marty was opening the wallet.

"What'll it be, kid?" he demanded, his oily eyes flashing to the wallet in Marty's hands.

"Wait'll I see," Marty smirked. He glanced inside the wallet. He whistled appreciatively. "Make it Scotch. The real. Double. I drink like a gent after this kinda haul," he said.

The barkeep grinned, exposing yellowed crags of broken enamel. His oily eyes flicked again to the wallet, and then he moved off without any further comment.

Before the barkeep returned with the drink, Marty tabulated the results of the day's work. Two hundred bucks. In tens and twenties. Plus, of course, some chicken feed of three wrinkled singles. The other bills, being fresh and crisp, Marty suspected of having come recently from a pay envelope.

Marty removed the cards and identification from the wallet, not bothering to read any of them. It was a matter of complete indifference to him who or what his victims happened to be.

He tore the cards across several times,

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dropped them into the spittoon. He was about to look about for a disposal place for the billfold when he suddenly changed his mind.

It was a damned nice wallet, smooth and slick to the touch. Marty was an expert on wallets. He'd seen plenty of them, and knew that this one was considerably better than run-of-the-mill. He shrugged, glanced again at it, and put it in his pocket.

Hell, maybe he could sell it to some stiff at a bar.

The barkeep came back with the Scotch.

"Stand 'em up for the house, once't," Marty said expansively. "This is gonna be my night fer a little celebrating."

The barkeep grinned.

"Even better than yuh thought, huh, Marty?"

Marty shrugged his shoulders noncommittally, but his leer was proudly boastful.

"Oh, I dunno," he said. . . .

WHEN Marty Merkin woke, the following morning, the elevated trains jarring past the window of his dingy room almost tore his head off with their racket.

He was conscious of an extremely thick tongue, a faint nausea in the pit of his stomach, and the fact that he had a grandfather of hangovers.

He sat up in bed, his skinny fingers digging deep into his balding scalp as he tried to massage himself into complete wakefulness.

It was then that he noticed the hairpin on the pillow beside his own—and the faint reek of cheap perfume that hung heavily in the room.

He looked quickly around, saw that he was alone, cursed, and climbed shivering from his bed. The lipstick wounds on the tips of the crushed cigarettes in the dresser atop the ash tray were further evidence that he had not been alone earlier that morning.

He squinted, trying to remember where he'd been, what he'd done. But it was tough sledding. There were plenty of parts in the evening, particularly the latter ones, that he drew blanks on. He could recall buying drinks for the house in a number of joints, of singing and boasting, and ordering more, and of laughing, red-mouthed girls who clung to his neck.

Suddenly he thought of the wallet, his own wallet, in which he had carried the profits of his day.

He cursed and lurched for the dresser. It was not there.

He found his pants, still cursing, turned them upside down and shook them. Some change, matches, a key fell from them. But no wallet. His coat proved to be equally barren.

"Damn her, that little—" Marty cursed his anonymous visitor.

He felt suddenly considerably more sick than he had on rising. The thought that everything but a few pennies had gone, was hard to bear.

And then, in a corner of the room, he saw the slick, expensive wallet which he had heisted the afternoon before. The sight of it was not pleasant. It reminded Marty that he had had two hundred bucks less than twenty-four hours ago. Two hundred bucks which he didn't have now.

"The dirty little so-and-so," Marty snarled. "The cheap little—"

HIS sentence died abruptly. There was something about the wallet lying in the corner of the room that was peculiar. Something plump and sleek and inviting.

Instinct prompted Marty to go over to the wallet and pick it up. Instinct told him, the moment he touched it, that something was screwy as hell—but

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wonderfully screwy.

He flipped it open quickly, gasping involuntarily as the contents were revealed. Bills, a number of them! Bills of big denominations!

Marty's hands shook as he held the wallet and flip-counted the money inside it.

There was almost three hundred bucks there!

He stared hard at the money, gimlet eyes almost popping. It was all old dough, greasy and wrinkled and well-used. Obviously unlike the crisp two hundred he'd had a little while back. But, just as obviously, real dough.

He was suddenly shaken by laughter, wild, relieved laughter that choked him finally and started him coughing hackingly.

He went back to his bed and sat down on the edge, coughing and laughing and holding the plump, money-stuffed wallet in his hands.

This was a scream, this was a riot. It was funny as hell. As drunk as he'd been, as cockeyed, roaring tight, he'd carried on his business with his pleasure and managed to filch another billfold, netting a haul even greater than the one from the musician.

It occurred to Marty that he'd been a smart operator indeed to place the take from this unremembered heist in the wallet he had filched from the musician guy. When the dame had gone through his own wallet, she'd probably taken every cent and been too dumb to look for this second wallet.

Marty frowned. He must have tossed away the wallet in which he'd swiped this last haul. Probably it hadn't compared to this sleek, expensive job that had been the musician's. As drunk as he'd been, he'd probably remembered that he had the fine wallet and put the money into it, rather than into his own, when he tossed the other wallet away.

He touched the wallet fondly. It was lucky. That's what it was. Lucky. The musician guy had not only given Marty a wad big enough for an evening's entertainment, he'd also given him a wallet that was good to hang onto.

Much of Marty's hangover was disappearing with his new, fine spirits. He found a bottle in the bathroom that had a couple of drinks left over in it, and he downed these quickly, splashed some cold water over his face, rubbed the moss from his teeth with a turkish towel, and began to dress.

Marty breakfasted at a fairly ornate and expensive restaurant. He had the works, paid for it with a flourish, and decided to take in a show. There was a war picture playing at one of the edge of the Loop theaters, and Marty decided to drop in and have a look at it. He was just in time for the first matinee, which was rather discouraging, because customers at a first afternoon show were never as well heeled as those at the evening performances.

However, Marty was able to push professional thoughts aside and to concentrate on the screen performance instead of business. After all, he was exceedingly well-heeled and he wouldn't have to work again for another two or three weeks if he didn't feel like it.

Marty walked out on the war picture in the middle of the first reel. He couldn't stomach all that guff about the suckers running out to get their heads shot off. They was just saps, plain saps, and the lingo they sprouted about liberty and justice and all like that was just straight cornoroo. He knew.

AT A billiard parlor, half an hour later, Marty found a few chums to play a little balk-line with. Marty was very good at billiards, and very proud

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of his ability. His eye was sure, his hands nimble and unerring. His cue work was of the best.

But he lost twenty dollars to a sharper he'd never seen before, and walked out knowing he'd been taken. He knew he'd been built up to his loss, and that he'd played sucker, but he'd lost on the square and there wasn't any kick he could make about that.

He casually took a paper from a newsstand while the newsboy's back was turned, strolled into a drugstore, ordered a coke, and sat there pondering the race results. After a bit, he ordered a complete luncheon, which he topped off with several extra pieces of pie.

On his way out of the drugstore, past the cashier, Marty paid the nickel check he received for his coke, pocketed the eighty-cent check he'd gotten for the luncheon. This small profit pleased him.

Marty stopped at Gibby's Cigar and Magazine Store to place a few racing bets and pass the time of day. There he encountered Leo The Louse, a swarthy, heavy-set operator whose specialty was fleecing visiting schoolmarms on blackmail charges.

"How's business, kid?" Leo asked.

Marty told him business was good. He asked how Leo fared.

"I dunno, kid. Seen the papers today?"

Marty was puzzled. "Yeah, I seen them."

"Read the front page?"

Marty was pained. "You know I don't read that pap. I read the jokes and the races, that's all."

Leo took the paper out from under Marty's arm. He flipped it open so that the front page was visible.

"Looka that," he said.

Marty blinked at the headline. POLICE SWEAR DEATH DUEL ON UNDERWORLD.

"Heat's on, huh?" Marty deduced.

"You said it."

"Why?" Marty demanded indignantly.

"You dope, don't you read no further than your nose?" Leo demanded disgustedly. He opened the paper again, pointed a stubby finger at the smaller heads on the front page.

Marty stared. SLAYINGS HAVE OFFICIALS AROUSED. Another: DRAGNET FOR ALL CRIMINALS SEEN AS POLICE SEEK SOLUTION OF FOURTH RIPPER MURDER IN WEEK.

"Well, I'm damned," Marty confessed. "The net, huh?"

"That means they might be bothering us," Leo said. "That means that maybe we'd be smart to lay low for awhile and knock off work until it all blows over."

"Ahhhhh," said Marty, "g'wan. That don't mean nothing."

Leo shook his head. "Maybe you think it don't. Maybe I think it does. Anyway, I'm taking it easy. That's always the way, this so-called Jack the Ripper who's committed them four murders this last week, he's an amatoor if I ever seen one. Them nut killers is all amatoors. But what happens, we professional heist operators has gotta suffer onaccounta an amatoor's blunders."

Marty picked up the contagion of Leo's indignation.

"Yeah," he said. "The rat!"

MARTY placed his bets, bid the time of day to Leo, and left the cigar store. His recent conversation, however, left him no peace of mind as he strolled slowly down State Street in the direction of his favorite tavern.

That dragnet business was no good. Even if they didn't nab you for what they wanted, they always found some-

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thing else. Marty had been the victim of general dragnets several times before. They weren't pleasant. Maybe Leo had something. Maybe it would be smart to stop operating for a few days, maybe a week, until this thing blew over. Hell, he had enough dough. Almost three hundred bucks—well, about two-fifty anyway. That was enough to see him through a couple of weeks, provided that he didn't go on any benders.

Marty stroked his weasel chin. "Yeah," he muttered. "Maybe Leo ain't so dumb. Maybe it's smart I should take myself a vacation of a coupla weeks."

It was a source of annoyance to Marty that he felt ill at ease passing the uniformed copper on the corner a moment later. Hell, his nerves were getting bad, he told himself.

"A little layoff," he decided, "don't hurt nobody."

Marty hurried onward, suddenly anxious to get to his hotel room. The nervousness the sight of the copper had brought on was now increasing.

He stopped at a liquor store several blocks from his hotel, and ten minutes later was safely closeted with a bottle in his room.

After a snort or two, Marty pulled forth his lucky wallet and examined once again its smooth, fine leather texture. It was almost as soft as satin, almost as smooth as human skin.

He moved from his pleasurable examination to the even more satisfying examination of the billfold's contents.

Flick-counting the bills with his thumb, Marty stopped short, stared popeyed at the roll, then counted again, carefully and slowly.

His voice was hoarse as he spoke aloud.

"Geeeeze, four hundred and twenty smackers!"

There should, of course, have been something less than two hundred and fifty dollars. There should not, under any circumstances, have been such an appreciable increase.

Marty counted the money again, this time swiftly. There was no doubt about it. Absolutely no doubt. Somewhere, somehow, the contents of his wallet had increased.

Marty tore the bills from the billfold, spread them out on his bed, counted them feverishly. He licked his lips, swallowed uncertainly. He felt a feverishly greedy elation at his discovery but was somehow uncertain in his joy.

"But how?" he muttered. "How did I pick up this extra moola?"

It occurred to him that he might have miscounted earlier in the day when he had first discovered the billfold. But he knew that such an error would have been in dircet contradiction to his habits of a double dozen years. No, that could not possibly serve as an explanation.

Marty put the money carefully back into the sleek wallet, put the wallet in his shirt pocket, and had a drink on his discovery. Then he had another. The succession that followed was inevitable.

IN THE room adjoining his own, someone had turned on his radio more loudly than necessary. A newscast was in progress, and Marty found himself unwillingly listening to the announcer's voice.

"Police Commissioner Eaker has promised that the general criminal dragnet he forecast earlier today will be started without further delay," the announcer was saying. "This declaration comes as a result of two more 'Jack The Ripper' killings which were discovered today. The badly mutilated body of an unidentified man, discovered

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early this morning in an alley in the Ravenswood district, and the similarly mutilated body found late this afternoon on a south side beach, brings the number of such murders to six, all perpetrated within the last ten days."

Marty had no way of shutting off his neighbor's radio. But he was able to walk into his bathroom and turn both washbowl spigots on full. Their noise drowned out the announcer's voice.

His hand was not too steady as he poured himself a long hooker a moment later. The announcer had reminded him all too forcefully of the dragnet he feared, and had added positive prediction to his fear by stating that the dragnet was no longer in the planned stages, but was starting immediately.

"Hell," Marty said, disgusted with himself. "Supposing they pinch me. I kin get sprang inna hour. Besides, I got this dough. I ain't no vag. I kin stand my own bail."

He had succeeded only in half reassuring himself, however. In the back of his mind was the memory of more than one occasion when—picked up in a dragnet—he had been unable to spring himself with any such ease. On those occasions, however, he told himself, it had been different. He had not had the money he now possessed. Nor had he had the cockiness his present affluence gave him.

He had another drink, while considering this. He was now reaching a condition of bolstered ego. A devil-may-care sort of recklessness was taking hold of him, pushing aside the inborn caution of criminal experience.

He took the wallet from his pocket again, opened it, removed the money, rifled it speculatively, put it back in the wallet.

"Hell," he muttered a trifle thickly, "they ain't got nothing on me."

He put the wallet back in his pocket; looked about for his coat, donned it, struggled into his topcoat, found his hat and started for the door.

Once outside his hotel, Marty hesitated a moment, then decided to find a saloon which was not so likely to be subject to a police raid.

A taxi was passing, and Marty hailed it. He gave the driver the address of a downtown bistro which, to Marty's mind, was a most respectable place.

Hell, he thought, settling back against the cushions, if he was going to have a time of it, he might as well enjoy himself among the elite, and in surroundings which were the best.

Marty magnanimously told the driver to keep the change when he paid him off with a dollar bill in front of the semi-swank bar he'd selected.

Marty was already going through the doors of the place when the driver, staring at the bill, called out:

"Hey! What the—"

The driver's jaws suddenly clamped shut, he folded the bill neatly, put it in his pocket, stared hard at the door through which Marty had vanished, then, grim-faced, threw the cab into gear and roared away from the curb.

INSIDE the plush surroundings of the bistro, Marty found a place at the bar, ordered a double Scotch and soda, and sat back on his stool to drink in the higher-priced atmosphere which was the hallmark of the place.

This wasn't the sort of joint to be raided. He'd be perfectly safe here from any dragnet stuff. It occurred to him that he might even be smart to register at the hotel of which this bar was a part. He'd be safer in its confines than he would in his own cheap dollar-a-day hideout.

The bartender returned with Marty's

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double Scotch. Marty found the sleek-soft wallet, removed a twenty-dollar bill from it casually and flipped it across the bar.

The bartender picked it up, to Marty's disgust, without a second glance or any indication that he was impressed by the bulging wallet from which it came.

Marty watched him carry it to the cash register, ring up the sale and begin to shove it in the drawer of the till. The bartender's back was to Marty, so he didn't see the sudden whitening of the man's face, the swift horrified alarm that came into his eyes.

But Marty did see the man swing around toward him, twenty-dollar bill in his hand, and fix him with a shocked stare.

The bartender's reaction was not at all what the little pickpocket had expected. It caught Marty quite by surprise and nettled him considerably.

Suddenly the bartender had returned to where Marty sat, the bill still in his hand, and was standing there before him, white-faced and distraught.

"Say, mister—" the barkeep began.

Marty cut him off.

"Whatsa matta? What's eating you?"

"This," the bartender said, shoving the bill toward him. "How did you come by this bill?"

Marty stared down at the bill, bewildered.

"Whatsa matter with it?" he demanded.

"Good God, man, didn't you notice?"

Marty squinted at the bill through eyes clouded by alcohol. And then he saw the inch-wide smudge in the corner of the twenty. It was a red smudge, a sticky smudge. A red, sticky smudge to which a strand of unmistakably human hair was stuck.

Marty almost broke his glass in the sudden horrified impulse that made his fists squeeze together hard. He felt suddenly out of breath, panic-stricken. His gimlet eyes bugged.

"Blood and hair," the bartender whispered huskily. "How do you explain it, mister?"

Marty's mental gears were grinding furiously in an effort to set his nimble wits into motion. They took hold, but his effort to keep a straight face didn't match the quick alibi that popped from his lips.

"I—I hadda accident," Marty heard himself saying. "Cut myself a little while back onna window."

Marty glanced at the mirror behind the bar, then, and his reflection told him all too clearly that his effort to keep a poker face to match the alibi had failed. And, from the expression on the bartender's face, so had the alibi itself.

"Where," he demanded suspiciously, "did you cut yourself?"

"Gimme the bill if you don't want it," Marty croaked hoarsely. He pulled out his wallet, dug desperately in it until he found a dollar bill. He shoved this across the counter, grabbed for the twenty.

"Just a minute!" the bartender exclaimed, grabbing the twenty just as Marty's fingers touched it.

They both pulled at the bill simultaneously. It ripped apart.

MARTY was badly frightened now, He looked around, saw that the scene was being watched by the other customers in the place. His panic increased. He could think only of flight.

He pushed himself back from the stool. It tipped sideways, crashing to the floor. He turned, bolted for the door.

"Hey!" the bartender shouted. "Stop that—"

The rest of the cry was lost to Marty's ears. He was in the street,

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running, moving south along Wabash Avenue as though pursued by a million demons.

His breath was coming hard now, searing his lungs, and the blurred vision he had of pedestrians' faces as he passed them on the run told him that he was drawing too much attention to himself. He turned down the first alley he came to, slowed to a gasping walk. He had to walk, his legs could run no further.

Wildly, Marty looked back over his shoulder. He could see no signs of pursuit. His gasping sob was one of relief. He stopped, leaning against the rusty lower braces of a fire-escape foundation.

Though it was cold, perspiration ran in rivulets down Marty's forehead, soaked his shirt to his back. The ache was leaving his lungs, strength was returning to his legs, and his dazed brain was trying to comprehend what had happened.

THAT bill . . . bloody money. What the hell? How? Why? Marty found the wallet, opened it with trembling fingers. It was fatter than it had been before, considerably fatter.

He forced himself to count it. Five, twenty, a hundred, a hundred and fifty, two hundred, three hundred, four hundred, four-fifty, sixty, five hundred dollars! More had been added!

It was while he counted them dazedly the second time that he realized that many of the bills were sticky, bloodstained. Marty's sob was terrified. It was not the money, not the bloodstains, that made him sickly frightened. It was the implication, overwhelmingly, horribly insinuating, that filled his soul with terror.

Suddenly he became aware of the soft, silken texture of the wallet in his hand. Not as he had been aware of it before, however, not with the pleasure of knowing that it was fine and expensive. This new awareness was different, frightening. There was something hideously familiar in the softness of the leather, something he could not bring himself to name, something that stuck in the passages of his mind and sent all other thoughts tumbling one upon the other in a jumble of panic.

He became once more aware of where he was, of the sounds of traffic, the noise of the Loop everywhere about him. It crashed in on his ears thunderously as if the gates of his hearing had suddenly been opened to its flood.

In a daze that was half-terror, half-drunkenness, he crouched there, shrinking up against the side of the building, staring down in horror at the wallet in his hands.

He shrieked, trying to throw the thing from him. But it seemed adhesively a part of his hands. He shook his hands wildly, wringing them together hysterically in an effort to wash the wallet from them. He could not rid himself of it.

ACROSS the alley there was a door. It was the fear of pursuit that moved him toward it, made him hurl himself against it. The door was unlocked, and Marty tumbled through it as it gave before his slight weight.

He landed on his shoulder and side, jarringly. And as he climbed wildly to his feet, he saw that he was in some kind of a storage room, musty and dimly lighted by a single bulb hanging from a cobwebbed cord above a pile of packing cases in a corner.

The door through which he'd hurled himself had closed as it rebounded from his impact.

He stood there, staring wildly at the emptiness of the room, his body shaking in convulsions of terror. He didn't dare look down at his hands. The wallet was still in them, his fingers closed tightly

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around the silken smooth leather, powerless to release their grasp on it.

And it was then that he realized there was someone else in the room. Even though he could neither see nor hear the other person, Marty knew he was not alone. He could feel the presence of the other, and he knew, without having to look, that his companion in the room lurked behind those packing cases in the corner.

He found himself moving toward that corner of the room in spite of the screaming fear that told him not to. His face was bathed in sweat, his balding hair plastered flat against his rat-like skull. His steps were slow, deliberate, like the mechanical motions of a powerless puppet.

They drew him irresistibly toward the corner of the room.

Saliva drooled from the corners of the pickpocket's mouth, his stare was idiotic, his mechanical steps grew shuffling.

And then the other person stepped out from behind the packing cases.

Marty had known instinctively who that other person was. But his appearance brought a dull moan from Marty's sweat-caked lips.

He was tall, cadaverously thin. His face was long, horse-like, and his eyes were dark, sunken sockets from which a pair of yellow-gray sparks flickered mockingly. His hair was long, its bristly gray strands coming to his collar. He wore a gabardine coat which hung shroud-like over his bony frame.

It was the musician from whom Marty had stolen the wallet on the elevated platform.

"No," Marty gurgled. "No. Damn you—" His throat constricted and he could say nothing more.

The tall, cadaverous, sunken-eyed man in the flapping gabardine coat spoke expressionlessly.

"You have brought it back to me."

His eyes didn't move from Marty's face, but the pickpocket knew what he meant.

The sunken-eyed man stepped back as Marty shuffled forward. He matched his steps to the pickpocket's, retreating as Marty advanced, until they were behind the packing cases.

Then the cadaverous fellow spoke again.

"Hand it to me," he said tonelessly.

He had stopped, his back against the packing cases, his thin, clawlike right hand extended toward the pickpocket. But Marty didn't notice the outstretched hand. He was staring in awful fascination at the open cello case which lay beside the other's feet. The inside edges of the case were stained a brownish red, a freshly sticky red.

And the contents of the case sent Marty reeling backward as screaming insanity shred the remaining fibers of his reason.

The gaunt, gray-coated figure grinned ghoulishly.

"Yes, human skin. I will make a wallet even softer than the one you have brought back to me."

Something burst inside Marty Merkin's brain then, and he began to giggle. Then his laughter rose shrilly to a higher, louder pitch. He screamed harshly, insanely, and laughed again, saliva sliding down the corners of his mouth, tears pouring from his eyes. He was screaming and laughing and sobbing all at once, and the wallet was clutched in his hands . . . the soft, satin-like wallet . . . the wallet as smooth as silk . . . smooth as human skin, which it was. . . .

THEY found Marty Merkins beside the ghastly cello case some hours later. The wallet was still in his hands, and he was crumpled inertly over it, laughing and sobbing and gibbering idiotically.

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There was no one in that storage room, of course, save the utterly insane little pickpocket, the gruesome evidence in the bloodstained case, and the horribly damning wallet of human flesh.

Perhaps the judgment of the court might have been more fair had Marty been committed to a mad house, as the attorney for his defense pleaded. But public indignation toward the ripper-killer—and the evidence that he was the killer was undeniable—insisted on the supreme penalty.

He was babbling idiotically about the man in the gabardine coat even to the moment they turned on the current of the electric chair. Which was ridiculous, of course. For had there been a man such as the one he droolingly insisted existed, the ripper-killings would not have ceased with Marty Merkins' death.

Yet they did cease then. At least around that section of the world. There might have been others. Somewhere else . . .

THE GREAT LEONARDO

By JEFFRY STEVENS

LEONARDO DA VINCI was an amazing individual possessed of so many talents and abilities that men down through the ages read of his exploits and gape with wonder at their number and diversity. It is unbelievable, a continual source of wonder how so much creativeness and genius could be concentrated in one lifetime, be the product of one man's mind. To Leonardo da Vinci is attributed great works of art on canvas and in sculpture, exploration and achievement in several different sciences, and numerous mechanical inventions.

Leonardo was an Italian by birth. His father was a lawyer of the city of Florence; his mother was a simple peasant girl. He emerged into the world in 1452, a world of superstition and ignorance, of corruption in church and state, a world of comparative intellectual darkness. There were a few great minds at work in his time in philosophy, art, and science. But astrology and alchemy were enjoying their hey-day, and medicine was scacely above the witch-doctor stage of development.

In terms of his own day, Leonardo was not an educated man. He preferred the study of nature to the Latin and Greek classics. With his curiosity to find out about the world around him, his desire to master every task he set for himself, and his capacity for disinterested research—the collection of facts, he was completely out of step with the men of his time. Truthfully he was far out ahead of all of them. He had only contempt for those scholars and doctors who took their knowledge second-hand, appealing a hundred times to an ancient authority for every one time that they appealed to their own experience and observation.

His first taste of schooling was acquired at the church school of Santa Petronilla where he went at the tender age of seven. He did not get along well with his classmates because he hated their cruelty to animals. They made a sport out of tormenting dogs and cats and pulling the wings off helpless butterflies. Leonardo loved animals and plants spending many hours studying their structure and beauty. While living at the home of his grandfather in Florence, he watched the construction of a building by the famous Ravenna. His intelligent comments and questions brought him to the attention of the great architect who became his teacher in arithmetic, algebra, geometry, and mechanics.

At the age of eighteen he went to the famous scientist, Toscanelli, the same man who had given Christopher Columbus so much valuable advice about his intended journey to the New World. Conversing with Leonardo, the scientist was amazed at the boy's genius for mathematics. Like Ravenna, he took the boy as a pupil. From him Leonardo learned all that was known about astronomy and mathematics and the laws of nature. During his spare hours, Leonardo amused himself by sketching what he saw and making models in clay. The boy's father carried some of Leonardo's creations to his old friend and artist, Andrea del Verrochio. The master was astonished at the boy's ability and soon took him into his workshop for further instruction.

Verrochio, a master goldsmith, painter, and sculpture gave the budding genius a thorough knowledge of those crafts. He believed that mathematics was the common foundation of art and science. He was an expert in the use of anatomy in art. From him Leonardo learned a

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great deal, but there came a time when the master realized there was nothing more he could teach his pupil. After the youth had been Verrochio's pupil for a time, the master allowed him to paint the kneeling angel in his picture, "The Baptism of Christ." Leonardo's angel so surpassed anything the master had done that Verrochio resolved from that day on never to touch a brush again.

At twenty-eight, Leonardo was tall, handsome, and had a remarkably strong physique. His physical strength had already distinguished him; his friends knew him to be an excellent marksman with the bow, a superior horseman and swimmer, and a master of fencing. Among the inventions he had already become famous for was a silver lute of many strings shaped like a horse's head.

One day Lorenzo the Magnificent, ruling head of the city of Florence, heard Leonardo play upon this lute and proposed that the young man travel to Milan and present it as a gift from his court to the Duke of Lombardy. The young artist so won the favor of the Duke that he remained in the court of Milan for most of 16 years. During this period Leonardo started a few pictures that were finished, but a great many more, like his famous "Last Supper" remained forever in the experimental stage. Leonardo was primarily an experimenter. He was driven by an unsatiable curiosity and a furious desire to find out what made the wheels go round. Nothing else mattered. As soon as he felt that he was on the right track to another discovery, he lost interest in the old problem and turned to something new.

Along with painting Leonardo worked on the cathedral of Milan, superintended the renovation of his patron's castle, and drew up the plans for the irrigation of the plains of Lombardy and the digging of a canal. In his spare time, he arranged pageants and other entertainments, designing the costumes and composing the music which was used for the occasion.

In this way, working and experimenting all hours of both the day and night, he had attained the age of more than sixty years at a time when the average expectancy of life was less than forty. Being endowed with an indestructible constitution, Leonardo still enjoyed good health. Painting and music no longer interested him as much as science. When King Frances I of France offered him a quiet position in his own court, the aging genius promptly accepted him. Frances felt honored and responded by turning an entire castle over to the master. He earmarked sufficient funds in the royal treasury to give Leonardo an ample income.

The great master bade farewell to his native Italy and together with his retinue of draftsmen, secretaries, and servants, he moved to his new quarters. Now at last he turned to his large collection of notes and scientific observations that had been collected during the previous forty years, hoping to consolidate and rewrite the information so that the world might benefit by his discoveries.

But it was too late. The master was rapidly losing his strength. In the spring of the year 1519, after two and one half years in the employ of the King of France, Leonardo felt that he would not have much longer to live. His pupils were already doing their best to relieve da Vinci of all the unnecessary details so that he might devote himself entirely to the main task he had set for himself. But when a man has lived the lives of a dozen ordinary mortals, he must expect that sooner or later the engine will show signs of wear and tear. With full premonition of his coming end, but without any fear of death, he quietly went to sleep one evening in the month of May of the year 1519 and never woke up.

Leonardo's full contribution to the world's culture and knowledge is beyond measure. It was he who first realized the value of the empirical method of study in science, which made observation and experience his sole guides in his search for truth. In anatomy Leonardo dissected at least thirty bodies making a special study of embryology. He discovered the fact of circulation of the blood and founded the field of pictorial anatomy. In astronomy he was the first to discover the true relationship of sun, earth, and moon, even before the time of Copernicus. Among his inventions were parachutes, flying machines, diving bells, submarines, chimneys, glass ovens and machines for shearing sheep, spinning, and making pottery. He made a variey of mills and scales, concave mirrors and pendulums.

He was the first man since Archimedes to record the principles of the lever. In drawings which he made for the study of difficult problems in physics, he developed the law of the conservation of energy. Before Galileo he discovered the law of virtual velocity. He stated the principles of gyration and the vortex, and the law of communicating vessels. He was the founder of hydrostatics and of the entire science of hydraulics. He understood the undulatory motion of the sea, and applied its principles of transmission and reflection to sound and light; he measured sound waves, explained the echo and the vibration of overtones. He explained the eye as a camera obscura, recognized the functions of the lens and of the retina and the mechanics of sight. And yet the world knows him best as an artist . . . especially as the painter of "Mona Lisa" and the "Last Supper," probably the two most famous paintings in the world.

The source of energy and talent that emanated from Leonardo da Vinci has puzzled all men who came after him. Leonardo was the prophet of almost everything revealed by the future. The world has not produced two such men, nor is it expected to create another one like him. This fifteenth century superman has never been equaled.

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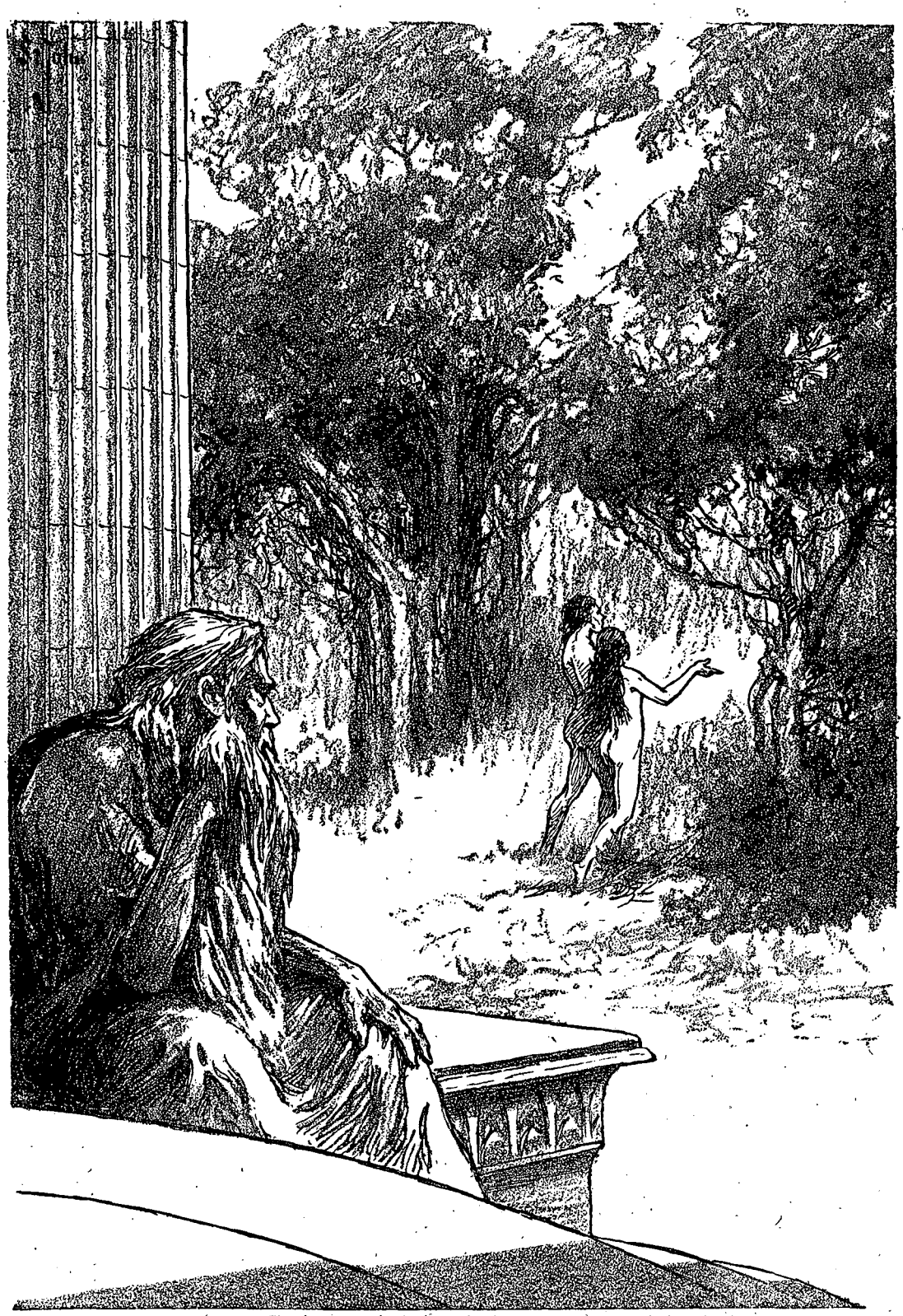

The last man looked at the happy pair . . . and then he knew—

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The Tale of the Last Man

By RICHARD S. SHAVER

All the world was his alone—because there were no other men left alive. "What profiteth it a man if he gain the whole . . .?"

NOW there came a time when of all the many myriads of men who had been upon this whirling earth, there was left but one—alone.

He sat in a many-tiered palace of green aconite, upon a beryl throne of stately carving.

He pondered—upon man's past. Of else there was little enough to ponder. He pondered upon the writings of certain wise men who had demonstrated that man was composed of love and knowledge intermingled, of how the very base of man's being was vibrating love, of how the rulers had been stupid and disbelieved their demonstrating. How the rulers had thought to augment themselves at the expense of other rulers, and had destroyed—peoples.

The last man looked about him at the many-arched windows curiously glowing, alive with figures and designed with many flowering trees and with strange beauty mingling in colored movement across the faces of them—

And he thought of all the many mighty artists who had wrought such beauty upon the earth, such wondrous fine designings they had made—and one by one had died and left no offspring, no young apprentice artist to keep alive their wonder-working.

The last man looked upon the great table that was in the room, and at the great and fine books upon it full of all man's wisdom, full of his accumulated stores of weighty thought wrung with such labor from the tortuous mental striving. He thought of how there was none to read the wisdom, to taste the mingled magic of the words that make sweet music to the listening ear as they pour forth their piled up knowledge.

The last man thought upon how everything that was upon the earth was his; there was none to contest his possession. All the mighty palaces man had builded belonged to him, all the lovely works of art were his to own and do with as he liked. All the wisdom of all the past was stored up in books for him to use—all the instruments of pleasure making, the swift moving vehicles, the broad flowing roads, the soft green hills and meadows, the cattle that grazed upon them, the broad farms, the forests and the mountains—all—all were his. He owned the earth, did the last man. And he sat and pondered.

He pondered upon man's past; that was.

He pondered upon the present; that was his.

And he pondered upon the future, that was not.

For he was the last man, alone.

HE THOUGHT how strange it was that men had fought for so many centuries, for such endless periods of struggle, that they might possess—

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what he now possessed. He thought, "if only I could hear someone laugh, I might enjoy these my possessions." For when he listened to the pleasure instruments that made many sounds to joy him, he was sad instead. And when he picked up a beautiful book to read the softly rhythmed words within, to look at the curiously colored pictures of things—of animals, of trees, of oceans, of men's doings in the past—there was no joy in the reading. There was only a measured sadness, as though all the future had poured into the present and frozen there, upon his chest.

The man thought. "All the things that man has fought for, that man has created and builded, all this beauty and this labor—all are mine. I should be happy; ownership is what men strive for. I should be very happy, I own the earth and all that is upon it."

The last man pondered upon his ownership—sought to comprehend the fact of his undisputed possession of all the earth, of all that had been man's. Aloud he said, "All are mine. Mine!"

His words echoed and reechoed in the great hall where he sat, back and forth and less and less—"MINE—Mine—mine—mine—mi—" until at last he heard his own voice no more. He was glad when the echo ceased. He looked at the ancient embroidered tapestries, the figured, painted silks; the man-work that graced the walls and sought to take pleasure in their subtle patterning, their pleasant meandering meaning. But only could he taste his heart that was lead, slowly sinking into an endless abyss in his breast.

The one man who was left of all the men who had been in life, this one man pondered upon the natures of time and death which twain had slowly, inexorably taken men from earth into the past until only he was left to peer fearfully into the future—and see no future, for none was.

He pondered upon the nature of time, his mind turned, inverted, twisted, pulled, prodded and unfolded this idea of time that had absorbed the race of men. One by one the last of the race of men had come to their place in time, and time had gone on leaving one less man. Where were they all, all these men who had been his forebears, whose blood beat in him alone—now? Blood that beat no other where. The blood of all men throbbed in him—he was all men. Time had taken men and left, for now, this man.

HIS voice was echoing again, and he was startled, having spoken unknowingly; "I am Man, man, man—ma . . ." and as the sound rebounded into less sound, he shuddered, for there were no ears but his.

Now his mind was seeing the picture of a woman and he looked to where the picture hung upon the wall, and he wondered "What was woman like?" for he had never known a woman.

And he turned on the music maker and listened to the voice of woman, singing, and that sound was very sweet, but lead lay in his breast and would not lift.

And again the man's mind dwelt upon those rulers who had disbelieved that man's base was love for man, who had destroyed the peoples in their lusting after ownership, who had destroyed man's power to bring forth—man. Man's tree of life had become weary of forever burgeoning only to be blasted. Woman had ceased to conceive, for man was no longer a being capable of love.

He had never known love or woman. The miracle of sex, in spite of all his searching of the learned books was to him a mystery of mysteries. What was

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this love upon which man was founded. Loving, giving unto others, joying in a comrade's joy, what were these? He knew not, knowing only ownership.

The man thought of how the cell of life is multiplied by division, by giving the half of itself away. It grows, and never dies. But man, who thinks to grow by taking everything, until himself had lessened until only he was left. And the last man was very sad and very wroth with anger toward his forebears who had known so little how to think. Who had cared for man so little that man had almost ceased to be. And he had never heard a woman laugh.

Slowly in the mind of the man who was last upon the earth a mighty purpose formed. The purpose grew as he fed it with his will. Then he leaped to his feet with a mighty shout of gladness, and sweet to his ears was that echoing sound alive and full of joy, exultant with a plan for life.

He hastened to the ancient long-sealed laboratories, where labor had ceased to be love so long ago. He had remembered something that had once been known and done and then forgotten in the piled records of man's achievements. And in his mind was humming a thought, "multiplication by division."

After long travail and much searching of the ancient magic that had been, after many trials and many bits of flesh had been hacked from his living body —at last within a life-womb a living egg was multiplying. A human egg, an augmenting cell of life—man life—was dividing into an homunculus.

So it was that the laughter of children was heard in the palace of green acondite, and upon the knees of the last man was dandled flesh of his flesh, laughing and loved. And in his wisdom and long white beard they called him —God!

For earth was love again. And he lived to hear a woman laugh.

The last man, in his musing, murmured "So time—is circular, after all." An echo answered, "ALL, All, all, al . . ."

The name of the gardens about the palace of green aconite, where the last man talked and walked with the beautiful new beings—the name of the gardens was . . . EDEN.

NEW FACES FOR SALE

By JUNE LURIE

A STEP-COUSIN of the Blood Donors' Center is the Grafting Donors' Bureau, a buyer and seller of human flesh. This new non-profit-making enterprise which has been started in New York by one of the best-known plastic surgeons in the country, is a sort of clearing house for all those engaged in the occupation of making people look different than they are.

The operation of this merchandiser of human flesh is fairly simple. All a doctor has to do is call the Bureau and say, "I want a strip of cartilage of such-and-such length and from a certain blood type." The Bureau then takes out its files and contacts a donor with the necessary qualifications, and sends him to the plastic surgeon who made the request.

Like the Blood Donors' Center, the Grafting Donors' Bureau is flooded with offers from hundreds of persons to give "any part of their bodies" for enough cash. Actually it is not a part of the body that is needed, but cartilage which is found in only five places: the nose, both ears, and the floating ribs. Unlike blood, cartilage does not replace itself, so that donations can only be made once.

The average piece required is about one-half inch by one-quarter inch; the largest ever used measured two inches by one-half inch. The donors receive from $100 to $500 for these tiny strips.

The most common reasons for face-lifting are to eliminate dished-in noses, humped noses, receding chins and protruding ears. In these cases the Bureau tries to match donors with patients: donors with humped noses, for instance, give their excess cartilage to patients with dished-in noses. So nature is improved upon—at a price.

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All Venus was menaced by the thrall of the eagle-cult. Force was one answer, but not the only one. It took brains to fight eagles—or were they eagles?

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CULT OF THE EAGLE

By BERKELEY LIVINGSTON

MAYOR Whitcomb Delbar was in fine form. The words rolled sonorously from his tongue:

"I can say with the utmost sincerity that the citizens of this gre-at city are in for a period of such peace and prosperity as has never been seen before in all its annals."

There was scattered applause from the audience which was composed of the Downtown Business Men's Association. By Selden hid a yawn behind a palm as Whitcomb went on:

"I have been asked by the executive committee to tell the gentlemen of the Association what is being done about this—er—minor outbreak of violence and crime . . ."

"Mr. Mayor," a voice interrupted from one of the tables in the rear. Selden's boredom lifted somewhat when he saw it was MacCooley, the owner of the largest department store in the city, who had lifted his voice. "The association would greatly appreciate a definite policy advocated and enforced by the city. There *have been promises,*" MacCooley admitted, "and I will not say that they have not been kept, but neither the promises nor the action we have seen have been enough to alleviate the situation."

There was a prolonged applause at the end of MacCooley's indictment.

The mayor's smile turned grim and his voice became smoothly unctious. He hadn't survived four elections because of his smile alone. Politically he was

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both astute and intelligent, and he realized that MacCooley and the rest had justification in their demands. Beneath the bland exterior of pleasant smile and unconcerned manner, was a very worried man. His answer, however, showed nothing of what went on within. Selden gave the mayor his grudging admiration as Delbar said:

"The gentleman's point is both reasonable and well-taken. It is only to be expected that the association should both hope for and receive the fullest co-operation from the city council—particularly in this matter. But what, may I ask, do the gentlemen expect us to do?"

There were scattered cries of, "That's your lookout."

The mayor continued to smile. It was a bleak smile now.

"I'm afraid," Delbar said, "that such is not the case. Dumping this thing in our laps and saying, 'Here, take care of it,' doesn't make it completely our baby."

The gloves were off. Delbar had put it squarely to them.

There was a few seconds of silence, then a rising tide of voices, some decrying the mayors' stand, others pleading for a hearing, and still others demanding instant action on somebody's part. Selden compared them to a coop-full of hens whose domain had been invaded by a strange rooster. Only MacCooley was calm in all the uproar.

He banged his empty water tumbler on the table and demanded silence. Gradually the shouts died, as he continued to hammer the table. When order was restored, MacCooley said:

"Gentlemen. This is not a stag, so let's get one thing straight. We have *demanded* of the mayor that he attend our meeting. But since the meeting has turned into a football rally, I say that the executive committee, which is the voice of the association, be permitted to speak to the mayor once more and see if we can work out something concrete in the way of a program."

THERE were some dissenting voices but MacCooley's suggestion was passed. The five members of the executive committee and the mayor retired to an ante-room, and with them went By Selden, news analyst and radio commentator for the World Broadcasting System.

MacCooley got down to cases immediately.

"Just how do things stack up, Whit?" he asked.

Delbar undid his collar, clipped a cigar, lit it, looked judiciously at the glowing end, then turned a blank face to the other and said:

"They don't. Riley is ready for the nut house. I've got a thousand cops on this thing, it holds priority over everything else, and there isn't a damned thing to show for it."

"But Delbar," one of the others said; he was also a department store head; "if this thing keeps up we'll go to the wall. We checked today, I mean the whole street, and there has been ten million dollars stolen, cash!"

"I know!" Delbar said brusquely. "And here's something none of you know—several things, I should say. A hundred and fifty millions in cash have been stolen from our banks. That's right, a hundred and fifty million. You all know that we are not the only city suffering these losses. All over the country, from coast to coast, in every large city, the same thing holds trus. And thus far, nothing has been done. Not because they haven't tried. But simply that no one, and that includes the F. B. I., has been able to get a single clue to who's behind this."

For the first time, Selden put in his

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voice. Oddly enough they listened with some show of respect. Although only a sort of reporter for his newscast connections, Selden often acted as a voice in the interests of the people.

"Mr. Mayor," he began, "You speak of the millions which have been lost: I want to ask about the lives that have been lost. As of last night eighteen hundred men and women have died solely from and due to this crime wave. Is there no clue to these murders?"

"No," Delbar said in a low voice.

The others felt a stirring of shame that they hadn't thought of those whose lives had been lost protecting their interests. Selden looked about him, wondering how men could be so callous, then decided the hell with it. His newscast would carry a scathing condemnation of the association and of the mayor. He knew nothing would be settled here. Lifting his top coat from the back of the chair, he threw them a curt good night and stalked out.

It was a crisp, fall night, just cool enough for the wearing of a coat, yet not so cold that it was necessary to bundle up. Selden decided to walk to the restaurant where his friend was waiting him. He had put the last two hours he had spent from his mind. It was a habit he had acquired to think only of the present and the future. The past would always be past.

He smiled to himself as he thought of the man he was going to meet. It had been several years since he had seen him last, and the place had been many thousands of miles away. Sofia, to be exact. His friend's name was Dmitri Kousharis, a Bulgar.

Selden had received a phone call at his apartment the night before. Kousharis had been at the other end of the wire. Kousharis had been almost incoherent in his talk. All he had wanted to know was when he could see Selden. When Selden had said that the following night would be the first free night, Kousharis had named a small Greek restaurant as their meeting place and had hung up. Now Selden was on his way to that restaurant.

IT WAS a dingy neighborhood. Taverns and second-hand clothes shops vied for predominance in the street's business. Here and there a restaurant displayed posters in unwashed, fly-specked windows. For the most part the restaurants were Greek owned. The prices displayed and the food served were both cheap. They had to be. For this neighborhood was Skid Row. Many a drunk gave Selden a second look, thinking perhaps that here was a likely touch, or for other, more lethal reasons. But the second look always took in Selden's six-foot frame and wide, muscular shoulders, and if they saw the face, with its strong chin and even, determined look, they certainly gave up any ideas they might have entertained.

The address was 218. It wasn't really a restaurant, more a coffee shop.

Selden pushed past the swinging doors, relics no doubt of another time in the store's life, and stopped on the threshold. Grey-blue smoke rose in a solid curtain to the ceiling. A long, imitation-marble counter ran the length of the shop. Two rows of wooden tables, some furnished with dirty cloths, others bare, were pushed close to the side wall. Each table held a full complement of men. There were no women to be seen.

A few bums sat at the counter, mingling with several men, who, from their appearance were truckers or laborers. Selden was quick to note that only the men at the counter were eating. The ones at the tables seemed to hold the place as a library or forum of some kind. For the most part there was no food in front of them, but some few

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were drinking coffee.

Selden was reminded of another cafe, in Sofia, the Nickolai Cafe, not so much by the material aspects, but by the spiritual qualities of the place. These dark-skinned men, most of them needing shaves, *all* of them talking, the majority with a foreign newspaper before them, could have been transplanted from that same cafe.

He stood on the threshold for only a second, then walked toward the back, keeping his eyes peeled for Dmitri. His friend had either not arrived or was in the back room. As Selden reached the end of the counter, he saw two men walk through a door at the rear of the store. When the door opened to let them through, it revealed a back room as smoke-filled as the front. Judging from the number of men crowding a table, it was used as a gambling room.

Selden sat and ordered a coffee. He looked at his watch and realized he was a few minutes early. There was a paper on the counter in front of him so he picked it up and leafed through the pages to the sport pages. But while he seemed absorbed in the sheet, his ears were alive to the talk around him. Of all his accomplishments, Selden's most valued was his linguistic ability. And he understood both languages spoken at the tables. He had recognized one, Greek, the moment he came through the door. But he had been surprised that the other was also prevalent, Bulgarian. The two did not mix, either in language or ideals. Unless . . . He put the idea from him. Sofia was a long way off. The arm of the IMRO wasn't that long.

He listened to the talk with half a mind; it was wholly political in nature. With the other half he speculated on the reason for Dmitri's excitement. Why Dmitri altogether? He had last seen him in Sofia just before the first post-war elections. Then his paper had cabled Selden to return. It was the last he had heard from the excitable little man until last night.

SELDEN looked at his watch again. It was now several minutes after the appointed time. Dmitri had the habit of punctuality. He looked about him once more. Perhaps he hadn't looked sharply enough the first time. No, Dmitri was not here. Suddenly Selden was filled with a sharp inner excitement. There had been things on his mind the night before, when Dmitri called, and he hadn't given thought to *what* was behind the call. Here, however, in this altogether out-of-the-world-of-Chicago-place, Selden examined the whole thing in another light.

Dmitri was in Chicago. The last he had known of the man was that his party was to go into power in Sofia. All of Dmitri's interests lay there. Then what was he doing here? And why the secrecy?

A waiter, his arms full of cups and sandwiches, passed Selden on his way to the back room. Of a sudden Selden made up his mind to investigate that back room. Perhaps Dmitri was there.

Just as Selden arrived at the door, behind the waiter, two men arose from their table close to the door and moved in ahead of Selden. The door opened to the waiter's kick. He went in, the two ahead of Selden squeezed by the guard, and Selden attempted to follow. But the guard, a beetle-browed ex-pug or wrestler barred entrance by simply putting his body across the threshold.

"Sorry, bud," he said. "Members only."

Selden looked past the man and saw that inner room, in size about a fourth of the outer room, was in reality a gambling joint. There were two tables at which men were playing either poker

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or the Greek equivalent, *pasetta*. There was a stand at which stood a dealer and around which were clustered some ten or twelve men. It looked like a black-jack table. In the center of the room, and the one which held the greatest attraction, was an oblong table. Craps!

Selden grinned down at the guard and said:

"Can't a guy shoot a little crap, fella?"

"Sure," the guard said. "There's a game under the El. Try that."

Selden continued smiling, but it was a little grim now. He had the desire to push the guard . . . with his fist across the bridge of the man's nose. But that would get him nothing—except, perhaps, a few broken bones. Selden started to turn away and stopped, blank-faced. He had looked into the eyes of Dmitri.

The little man was at the crap table. Their eyes had met but in the other's was no sign of recognition. And knowing the other's excitable nature, Selden knew something was up. Dmitri, unless something was wrong, would have come over at a run.

"C'mon, honey," a girl's voice said from below his shoulder. "Don't hold up the line. I hear the rattling of bones."

The guard was looking past Selden and grinning in broken-toothed delight. Selden looked down, past his left shoulder and into the blue, friendly eyes of a very pretty girl. Behind her were four people, two men and two women. Before the girl knew what was happening, he took her arm and marched past the still suspicious guard.

"I thought you'd never get here, baby," Selden said.

HE COULD feel the guard's eyes boring into his back as they sailed past. There was no expression in her eyes, now. She was struggling to release her arm from Selden's grasp while they entered the room. But he didn't let go until they were at the crap table. Then he bent his head and said:

"Thanks, baby. I wanted in and the pug at the door said no."

"You must have wanted in badly, from the way you held my arm," she said sharply.

"Sorry," he apologised, and left her. But with him he took a mental picture of the way she looked. She wasn't tall, yet gave the impression of height in the way she carried herself. She was wearing some sort of headdress which permitted her neatly-waved light brown hair to show. She had regular features and nice teeth. Her slender body was wrapped in a knee-length sport coat, beige-colored.

They were lined two-deep at the crap table. Dmitri was in the inner group. Selden edged his way in until he was standing at Dmitri's right shoulder. Suddenly he smelled perfume. He didn't have to turn to see who was standing beside him. It was the girl.

Someone had missed making his pass and the dice passed to the next player. The stickman's low voice urged the players to get their money down. The only sound besides that of the stickman was the dice hitting the boards as they rolled out. A trey and deuce stood face up on the cloth.

Silver dollars were placed on the table as the players bet on pass, come-bet, and other combinations. Dmitri placed a small stack of dollars on the pass side. Selden fished in his pocket for some loose bills he carried and took a ten dollar bill out and put it along Dmitri's money. He had to lean over, as he did so.

"Excuse me," he said.

Dmitri didn't look up but mumbled "Hokay."

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The dice player rolled twice, then came up with the same two numbers. The stickman shoved the two rolls of dollars—Selden's bill had been exchanged for silver—toward the two. On the next roll the shooter failed to make his point. No one else wanted to take the dice. Suddenly a slender arm reached past Selden and fingers opened and closed as a signal for the dice to be passed that way for the one wanting to roll. It was the girl.

She laid a hundred dollar bill on the cloth and looked questioningly at the stickman.

"You're covered," he said.

The girl rolled the dice.

Seven.

"Let it lay," she said, when the man put a hundred dollars alongside her money.

Six. No one covered. Nine, eight, four, another four, and still no one covered. Then she rolled another six.

"Let it lay," she said again.

Seven again and she let it ride. Now there was sixteen hundred dollars on the table. Only the house covered here, Selden saw. Or rather on bets of this size, only the house covered.

She was standing directly in front of him, now. As she took the dice again, she turned and smiled mischievously into his eyes.

"Bet a buck I crap," she said.

"Bet," Selden said.

She rolled the dice. Ace, deuce.

The stickman raked in the money and waited for her next bet.

"Pay," she hesitated a fraction of a second, then finished, "baby."

Selden gave her a dollar. She put it down and rolled the dice.

Four.

She sevened out on the next roll. The stickman passed the dice to the next player and the girl turned away and squeezed past Selden without looking up at him. Yet when she passed him he felt sure that his body had felt the deliberate pressure of hers. Whatever he was thinking went by the boards a second later, for Dmitri had turned also and in turning stepped hard on Selden's toes.

"Par'n me," Dmitri said aloud. And in an undertone, a single Bulgarian word, "Come."

SELDEN hesitated, long enough for the other to get clear of the players, then turned and followed. Dmitri was standing along the wall near the door. When he saw Selden leave the table, he nodded to the guard who opened the door for him. Selden followed but not too quickly. Every instinct told him that Dmitri's actions warranted secrecy. Whatever was on the Bulgar's mind made the man act with caution.

Selden was facing the guard again.

"Wise guy, huh?" the guard said.

"No," Selden said pleasantly. "I just thought the El's too far."

The man's eyes emptied of light. His shoulders slumped slightly and Selden shifted his feet a bit, ready for the coming blow. But the other changed his mind. Instead, he opened the door and, as Selden stepped through, said out of the side of his mouth:

"Might see you later, guy."

Selden hoped not but said nothing.

Dmitri was sitting alone at a table. Selden looked around and noticed that Dmitri had picked the only unoccupied table in the place. Selden made a face, as if his choosing to sit beside Dmitri was not to his liking, then sat beside the other. Dmitri looked up at him when he sat down. It was a casual look. The sloe-black eyes blinked slightly, then went down to engross themselves in the newspaper lying on the table.

The waiter came over and they ordered coffee.

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Dmitri folded the paper so that only his forehead was visible to Selden. Words flowed softly over the folded edge:

"I think we are being watched. I don't like it. Act casual."

The waiter brought the coffee and Selden ordered a sandwich. Dmitri was satisfied with the coffee. Selden took a bite out of his sandwich and as he chewed at the ham, said:

"What's wrong, 'Mitri? Why the act?"

"Later. Follow my lead," Dmitri said.

There was the heavy sound of footsteps coming past their table. Selden looked up at the backs of four men who walked by. And co-incident with their passing, came the sound of that light voice again:

"Tally-ho! A table. Gather 'round, children!"

There was no need for him to turn to see who it was. The girl.

The paper came down to Dmitri's eye level. A message passed between the two men. Nothing was said, but Selden knew Dmitri was going to get up and that he wanted the other to follow.

Selden waited only to finish his coffee before setting out after Dmitri. The Bulgar was walking south on Halsted. Selden kept ten feet behind him. Dmitri walked as if there wasn't anything on his mind except a stroll. A block passed. The El structure loomed almost overhead when Dmitri stopped, lifted a leg on a refuse can and began tying a shoe lace. Selden continued past him, but as he went by, Dmitri said, "Under the El."

Selden continued without pausing. At the El, he turned left and waited in the shadows for Dmitri to come to him. He didn't have long to wait. There was a rustle of sound beside him and a hoarse voice exclaimed, "I am glad to see you." A thin, nervous hand clasped his in a straining grip.

Selden bent his head and asked:

"What the hell's up, 'Mitri? Out with it."

"Listen," Dmitri said tensely. "I can't tell you everything now. But the whole world's in danger. I had to take the chance of getting to you. I think they're wise to what I did. If so, then they . . . *What was that?*"

SELDEN felt the little man's body turn against his as he uttered the last words in a sort of hoarse, fearful croak. Selden turned with the other but saw nothing.

"Take it easy," he whispered. "There wasn't any . . ." He didn't finish the sentence, for suddenly from the deeper shadows which lay behind the beams and towers of the El, two figures leaped out. Selden saw only that they were men, then they were on them. Selden tensed and as one of the two swerved in toward him, stepped forward to meet him. It was then he saw the gleaming sliver of metal in the man's hand.

The assassin struck with the speed of light. But Selden moved a split second sooner, so that the knife instead of striking its intended goal, went harmlessly past his body. At the same time Selden twisted half way around and as the attacker's arm went past with the force of his lunge, Selden caught the arm in a hammer lock. There was a horrified shriek of pain as Selden twisted sharply at it. There was the brittle sound of bones snapping. Selden continued to pivot, twisting as he did so.

Suddenly, from the pair scuffling beside them there came a deep groan of pain. One of the figures stepped away from the other. For a second Selden thought it was Dmitri by the figure's smallness. But when he saw an arm

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come down and disappear for an instant into the other's falling body, he knew he had been mistaken.

Selden thrust his man from him and leaped to Dmitri's rescue. Too late. The other man ran, even as Selden was on him. There was nothing to do except see how badly Dmitri had been hurt. He lifted the slight figure and carried it to where there was an oblong of light from the window of a hotel across the way. Gently he placed the body of his friend on the refuse-strewn earth. Bloody froth-bubbles dyed Dmitri's lips a deep crimson. The knife had found a bad spot.

"By . . . By . . . By . . ." Dmitri mumbled. His eyes were closed and his face was twisted in pain.

Selden knelt and placing his lips close to his friend's said:

"Here. Beside you."

"Lis—ten. Eagle . . . Eagle cult. Khourva . . . 'Member . . . Sofia?"

"Yes! Yes, 'Mitri! What about—" There was no need for any more questions. Dmitri couldn't have answered them. Dmitri was dead.

Selden stood up and rubbed his trousers free of dirt stains. It was an automatic gesture. He was too stunned by what had happened to think coherently. Then it hit him! Dmitri was dead. Someone had tracked them down here and had killed the little man. But Selden also had been attacked. He broke out in a cold sweat.

Quickly Selden thought the situation out. He knew if he stayed he would have to do one of two things. Call the police, which meant answering a lot of questions to which, as yet, he didn't have the answers. Or take a chance on getting away, hoping that no one saw them go under the El. As he remembered, there hadn't been anyone on the street when they passed under the structure. Of course that didn't mean anything.

Selden lifted his hands to the light and saw they were clean of blood. Softly he bid farewell to his dead friend: "I'll take care of those boys, 'Mitri."

Selden leaned against the last pillar, looking up and down as far as he could see. There was no one in sight. Then he ran out and hailed a passing cab. He didn't see the car drawn up half way down the block. Nor did he see the other car as it shot from around the corner just as he got to the cab. The car that was moving passed the cab. But the one at a standstill waited until the cab got into motion before the man at the wheel put his car into gear.

SELDEN'S face was set in lines of pain as he read of the finding of Dmitri's body. His coffee and roll lay untasted beside his knife and fork. The waitress came over and asked:

"Something wrong, Mr. Selden?"

"Uh . . . no, Dora. No. Guess I'm not hungry this morning."

"Must be love," the girl said wistfully, and wished it might be. And that she were the girl.

Selden shook his head for her to go away. When she did, he continued reading the account of the murder, whispering the highlights to himself:

"Body unidentified . . . Three thousand dollars in cash . . . no one saw murderer . . . knife found nearby, unstained indicating that more than one man was involved in attack . . . Police will act . . . another chapter in outbreak of crime sweeping . . ."

He laid the paper down and reflected on what he planned doing. Just then the girl came back to tell him there was phone call at the cashier's desk for him. It was MacCooley.

"Selden speaking . . . Yes, Mr. MacCooley . . . That's right, I was going

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to talk on the meeting last night . . . Could I substitute a script for that? Why? . . . I see. Well, yes, I can . . . Very well. My broadcast is over at noon. I'll make it by one. At your office. Goodbye."

He hung up, paid his check and walked out. His eyes were crinkled in speculation. MacCooley wanted him to substitute scripts because he had information that was of great value. Fair enough. But what sort of information? That brought to mind a more pressing matter—Dmitri's death. There was some information the dead man had whispered to him with his dying breath. The key to that lay in his files at his office.

Selden's office was high up on the thirty-fourth floor of the Pure Oil Building.

He unlocked the outer door, moved swiftly to the inner office and stopped, aghast, on the threshold. The place looked as though a Florida hurricane had hit it. Papers littered the floor. The desk had been ransacked, every drawer opened and empty. His file had been thrown to the floor, its lock forced and every compartment gone into. Feverishly, Selden searched the file for the one thing he was interested in. It wasn't there. Nor was it among any of the papers on the floor, though he went through them twice. Whoever had gone through the file had gone through it for that piece of paper and nothing else. That was all that was missing.

HE LEFT off his frantic search and stepped to the window overlooking the river below. Thirty-four floors down was the street. The roof was an additional four floors above. The outside door had been double locked. It hadn't been tampered with. The only means of entrance was the window in the inner office. He started to go from the window and something caught his eye. A large feather had been caught in one of the cleats attached to the window for the use of the window washers. Selden threw the window wide open and reached out for the feather.

There were only a few birds large enough to have shed a feather that size.

"So 'Mitri was right! The Khourva file is gone," he said aloud. "That devil has something to do with all this. And if my hunch is right, he has to do with all the robbing and killing of the past two weeks. Hmm. They've got the file . . . but I know where I can get another."

. . . Old Burrows was still the keeper of the morgue at the *Dispatch*. He greeted Selden joyously.

"Jeepers, By!" he said. "Place ain't the same since you left. Don't tell me the old stuff's still gotcha?"

"Sort of," Selden grinned. "Look, fella. How's chances for me looking something up?"

"You? Anytime! Help yourself. Ain't forgotten where things be, have you?"

Selden hadn't. And it was all there, under IMRO. The sub-heading was Khourva. It read:

Re: Khourva

Head of The Group of Nine, a terrorist organisation. Claimed to be head of the IMRO. Khourva had the reputation of being executioner for the group. Last heard of in Turkey where he had fled the Allies.

The particular group of which Khourva was head was known as The Eagle Clan. Their hangout was in the mountains from which they'd descend in their terroristic activities.

Activities suppressed in 1944, but speculative as to whether they have disbanded.

—By Selden

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LAWRENCE MacCOOLEY had the most amazing face Selden had ever seen. How it was possible for the same face to have such an angelic expression and such sardonic eyes was beyond Selden's comprehension. The two were seated on an immense, semi-circular couch in the library of the MacCooley mansion on Sheridan Road. The couch was upholstered in some brilliant red silk material and faced a blazing fire in the huge fireplace. A coffee table was at their feet on which reposed a decanter of Scotch, two small balloon glasses, a box of cigars and a small cloisonné cigarette case.

"I don't think I was very clear on the phone this morning, was I, Selden?"

Selden said, "Mr. MacCooley, there is only one word to describe your talk —*babble!* If I wasn't aware of the urgency in your tone, I'd never have come up."

"Quite understandable, my boy. But I received quite a shock last night. A man was murdered and I am responsible for his murder."

Selden's mouth popped open and stayed that way for a few seconds while MacCooley went on.

"Yes. It goes back some eight days. I came home on that particular night and the butler informed me that some man was here to see me—from the butler's tone, a disreputable person, if you know what I mean. In fact he had been deciding whether or not to call the police.

"At any rate, I went to the library, where John had him wait. I must admit that John was right. He wasn't the kind of man you'd want to meet on a dark night. The man's name was Dmitri Kousharis. He was a Bulgarian. This Kousharis launched into the most fantastic story I've ever heard. He said that the country—the whole world, to quote him—was faced with disaster. I thought, of course, that he was mad. Certainly I couldn't be blamed for that."

"No. You couldn't, MacCooley. Because he told me the same thing, last night," Selden said.

MacCooley looked silently at him for a second, then went on:

"Selden, this man knew of the thefts of cash from the stores. What's more he told me precisely what Delbar said last night about the banks. I mean that they would be robbed also. More, that the whole country was in the clutch of this outfit. He gave me the name of this band. It's called . . ."

"The Eagle Clan," Selden said dryly.

"I see," MacCooley said softly. "You know as much as I. Suppose we combine our knowledge. What *do* you know?"

"Well," Selden said after pouring a drink and taking a short sip. "I'll have to go back some ten years to the time when I first met Dmitri and where I met him.

"I was a reporter on the *Dispatch,* covering the Balkans. It was in a little cafe in Sofia, called the Nickolai, that I first met Dmitri. The cafe was a hangout for some of us foreign correspondents. I was sitting there at the time with a man from Reuters, a fellow named, Edorn. He motioned toward a far table and said, 'See that fellow there? Any time you need to know anything around here, that's the chap for you.'

" 'Well,' I replied, 'I'd like some information now. Get him over, will you?'

"No sooner said than done. Dmitri, in those days looked like he needed food more than anything else. Later I discovered that was his natural appearance. What Edorn said was true. Dmitri knew facts and figures. Sofia politics, which were the politics of the

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country, were matters to be discussed in the back rooms of these cafes. Many a politico was made and unmade in those back rooms. The usual method of unmaking a politician was to have him assassinated. Many a reporter in those days would stumble over the body of someone who, only the day before, had been the leading figure in the political world of Bulgaria.

"These assassinations were due to a number of terrorist organizations, the most feared being the IMRO—or, giving the devil his due, Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization. Sounds like something out of Richard Harding Davis, doesn't it? But let me assure you it was no laughing matter. I don't know, nor do I think anyone knows, who the actual leader was. Personally I think the lead was rotated among several men to insure no one man's gaining mastery of the outfit. At any rate, when I was there a man named Khourva was the leader. I'm not boring you, am I MacCooley?"

"NO. Matter of fact it's interesting," MacCooley said.

"Good. Because it gets better as I go along. There was a lot of political unrest in the country at the time. Khourva was at the bottom of it, we knew. But he had disappeared. Dmitri told me where I could find him. I knew it would be a feather in my cap if I could gain an interview with the man. So Dmitri and I set off for the deep backwoods and the lair of the Eagle Clan.

"We got there after some adventures in which I saved Dmitri's life, for which he pledged undying devotion. It was night, a moonless night. Suddenly from the surrounding crevices and caves of the mountain hide-away there was a stirring of *things*. I say things because I never really saw the beings who surrounded us. But this I'll swear to: they weren't humans. There was a beating of giant *wings*. An odor as if we had stepped within a huge aviary. But the darkness was so intense we could see nothing. We heard only commands to proceed the way we were going. Then men came to meet us. They escorted us to Khourva.

You might picture Khourva as being dark-faced, leering like a grade-B movie villain. Instead, the man was blond, slender, handsome and debonair. But he had the mind of a devil! Oh, he was quite matter of fact about the whole thing. He was going to rule the whole world. All this in some future time, of course. There were several matters which had to be settled first, like the coming war! MacCooley, I tell you that man *knew* there was going to be a war!

"I was polite. After all, with the way some of those cut-throats were looking at me, I'd have been a damned fool if I'd acted otherwise. Then he told me the reason for what he had said before. There were allies he had gained, *allies from another world!* They would help him! The interview ended on that point. We were escorted back to where we had left our horses. And this I think was done deliberately, for we weren't led out the way we came in. But as we passed over the lip of a steep cliff, I looked down and saw the gleaming bulge of a mysterious looking plane, a plane without wings. It looked like the snout of some prehistoric monster, sticking from a cave in a hillside.

"I never printed the account of my interview. My paper and its public would have branded me a fool if I had sent in a story like that. But now! Look at this, sir."

Selden slipped the feather from his pocket and handed it over to the other.

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He finished the remainder of his drink while MacCooley examined the feather.

"As I understand it," MacCooley said after a moment, "you want me to believe that some bird opened the window to your office, and rifled your file of this information?"

"Got a better answer?" Selden asked.

MACCOOLEY rubbed his forehead with plump, well-tended fingers. He looked away through half-closed eyes. Abruptly he turned to Selden again.

"Listen," he said in suddenly sharp tones. "This Dmitri was found with three thousand dollars on him. That money was part of an amount *I* gave him."

"You?" Selden asked incredulously.

"Yes. Because he convinced me, without offering any real proof, of the existence of this Eagle outfit *here in this very city*. He begged me to secrecy in his investigation. He said he'd be able to offer me real proof and names and places. That's why I gave him *five* thousand dollars! He needed the money, he said, for bribery. I'll give you the condensed version of his story.

"These people were out to gain power throughout the country. Wholesale robbery of banks, merchants, every place dealing with large sums of cash, was the first step in their plan. When things had reached a point where these places were facing ruin, then by means of financial finagling they'd gain control. Sounds fantastic?"

Selden nodded.

"Not really so, though. Something like that was almost done, once. Only not through robbery of that kind. I asked him specifically about these Eagles of his. He said that the leader, a man named Khourva, had either heard or knew that there wouldn't be enough of them for another purpose he had in mind. So he compromised on this plan."

There was the sudden sound of a man's laughter, then a woman's joining in, from beyond the closed door of the library. It swung open and two people came in. There was no mistaking one of them. It was the girl of the gambling joint. The two men stood as the others joined them in front of the fire.

The girl threw her arms around MacCooley and said:

"Grandfather! Dick and I've just had fun. Oh!" She had caught sight of Selden. Her blue eyes turned almost black with excitement. "I'm sorry, grandpops. I didn't break in on anything, did I?"

MacCooley smiled in deep affection, and put his arm around the girl's shoulders.

"No, honey. By the way—Mr. Selden, my granddaughter, Maris."

Selden thrust out a hand and said, "Hi, babe."

He hadn't meant to say that. It wasn't a slip. It was just that the words had come to him and he had spoken them aloud. MacCooley looked at him queerly, but the girl grinned. She turned to her companion and said:

"By Selden is the famous commentator, you know, Dick. This is Richard Courtney."

Courtney was a tall, amiable-looking blond with a pleasant grin. But Selden didn't answer the other's grin. For he had become aware of something strange, a feeling that he and Courtney had met before. The girl continued to talk, breaking in on Selden's thoughts.

"You were in a hurry last night, weren't you, Mr. Selden?"

"I—I beg your pardon," Selden said. Yet he knew without any doubts that she meant about his coming out from under the El. He was right.

"What's the dig, Maris?" Courtney

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asked, noticing Selden's air of confusion.

"Why Selden's the man who—" Maris began. Then stopped suddenly. "My error," she went on. "Skip it."

COURTNEY looked at her more sharply than he realized. His face lost its amiable characteristics. A scowl contracted his brow and Selden drew his breath in sharply.

Courtney looked at his wrist watch and exclaimed:

"Hmm! Late as usual. Sorry, folks, got to dash. Glad to have met you, Selden. Be seein' you sometime. You to, chicken."

Maris saw him to the door. She returned when he left. Her face was serious.

"I almost upset the apple cart, didn't I, Mr. Selden?"

"What do you mean, Maris?" MacCooley asked.

"Your granddaughter saw me run from under the El where Dmitri was killed," Selden said.

"Last night?"

"That's right, grandpops. I was at that place where that Dmitri said he'd be. Courtney, Jane and another couple went along. Tell me, Mr. Selden, how did you make the acquaintance of our conspiring ex-friend?"

Selden looked at her, open-mouthed. MacCooley made haste to explain:

"My grand-daughter is my confident in all things. She was here the night that Dmitri made his appearance. She knows everything I know."

Some baby, Selden thought. So she plays peeper for the old man. Well, since she knew so much, maybe she could answer a few questions.

"Tell me, Miss . . ."

"Call me baby," she said, grinning up at him. "I sort of like the homey touch."

". . . How and where did you meet this Courtney?"

It was an unexpected question. The old man and the girl looked at each other in wonder.

"Why—why—" She hesitated, a furrow creasing her brow. "I think it was Jane Severn's, at a party. Yes, that's it. Why do you ask?"

"Reasons. Uh—noticed anything out of the way about him?"

"Can't say I have. He seems to have lots of money, although I don't know where or how he gets it. Does that help?"

Selden shrugged his shoulders. He wondered what Khourva was doing in Chicago. There was no doubt in his mind that the man called Courtney was the Bulgar outlaw. When Courtney had scowled, a tiny crease of a scar, a scimitar of white flesh, showed at the corner of one eye. Khourva had the same scar. And when Selden cast back in his memory, he remembered.

"Let's get back to Dmitri," the girl said.

"Honey," MacCooley interrupted her, "believe me, Selden is all right. He knows things we don't. He's our ally."

"The girl's right," Selden said. "Let's get back to Dmitri. Did he mention anything about where he suspected them of hiding out?"

"No. Except to say that he thought it was here in the city."

"Fine. Fine," Selden said in biting tones. "Like a needle in the hay-stack."

"Well, don't take that tone," Maris said sharply. "It's not grandpops fault."

"Sorry. I didn't mean it that way. Still, it's a lead. By the way, has Riley found anything new?"

"Nothing," MacCooley said.

"Oh, that egg!" Maris was sarcastic. "Our chief of police! He reminds me

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of the Keystone cops."

"And does the F. B. I. remind you of them, too?" Selden asked pointedly.

SHE was silent at that. MacCooley sat down again and helped himself to another drink. The girl and Selden joined him. They sat there looking into the redly-glowing flame, engrossed in their thoughts.

"Y'know," Selden said at last. "I've been thinking of the robbery of my files. There must have been something in the files they wanted. I wonder what it was? No," he continued, holding up a hand as the girl started to talk. "Let me puzzle this out in my mind. Maybe there's a clue."

He snapped his fingers, suddenly.

"I think I've got something," he said. "I was so impressed by what had happened that night that I wrote the whole thing down and kept a file on it."

Maris looked to her grandfather, who held up a finger to his lips requesting silence. Selden went on:

"What was there in that file I should remember? Ah. Now it comes to me. When Khourva was talking to me, he kept his ear peeled toward something in the rear of the cave where we were. I happened to look down and saw . . ." An incredulous expression came into Selden's eyes. "I saw," he went on in a low voice, "an immense claw sticking out of a crevice that led to the rear of the cave. The claw of a giant bird. And once I heard a whispered something from behind that crevice."

"All that's fine," MacCooley said. "And even if what you say is true, I still don't understand how they got here. Did they use that plane? Or did they carry Khourva and the others on their backs?"

Maris shook her head and made clucking sounds with her tongue.

"I think you're both out of your minds," she said, feigning a deep sadness. "I can only say what I did when I first heard Dmitri's story. That grandpops is so worried about this thievery at the store, he's ready to believe any cock and bull story. You're not being a help, Selden."

"And Dmitri's death? Is that something out of our fairy tale?" Selden asked.

"You haven't proved that it *has* a connection with what you're talking about," she answered with spirit.

Selden looked at her with admiration. There was a bright intelligence in her that her general bearing hid. MacCooley intercepted the look and beamed proudly. In other circumstances he would have said something complimentary, but now his mind was too full of the terrible things taking place. Twenty-six men had died in the last twelve hours. And their deaths cried for the finding of their killers.

"What would you have us do?" Selden asked.

"I would station the bulk of our police force in all department stores and banks," she replied. "Hire deputy police, like the auxiliaries of war days. They'd be enough to patrol the streets. I don't care how many of these crooks there are, there'd be more of the police."

MacCooley, himself, threw cold water on that idea.

"We tried something like that," he said. "It didn't work. Then tried something else; having money trucks, whole fleets of them, come to the stores to pick the money up. It cost like hell, but we thought it would be worth it. It worked the first night. The second, all the guards and drivers were found dead and the money gone."

"Pour me a drink," Maris said. She stood with her back to them, facing the dying fire in the hearth. Selden did as

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she asked. She turned and he saw that her face was no longer childish-looking. Her full lips were a thin line of determined decision.

"If I may offer a little idea," she said, hesitating a bit.

"Go ahead," Selden said. "It won't hurt, no matter how silly . . . I beg your pardon. I mean how unreasonable it may be."

"Save your apologies. You think Dick Courtney is Khourva, is that right?"

"Yes."

"He rather likes me," she said in a low tone, as if speaking to herself. "Why not let me follow him about? He's often asked me to have lunch with him. Invited me to his apartment for drinks. Somehow I've never had the time. I think I can make the time, now."

"Wait a minute," Selden said. "That's out, baby."

"It is? . . ."

"Yeah. I don't want you sticking your pretty neck into this," Selden said angrily.

"You don't? And who are you to tell me . . ."

"Just a moment, children," MacCooley broke in. "Selden is right. These men aren't playing games. They're killers. And you'd be just another to get rid of if ever they found what your intentions were."

She looked them both in the eye, smiled vaguely, and drank the Scotch. Then she pleaded a headache and left. Selden found himself wanting her there. Whether it was because she had lent a spark to their talk or whether the two men were tired, but a silence settled between them, a silence which Selden broke by saying:

"Guess I'd better run along. I'll give you a ring later. Maybe I'll think of something in the meantime."

THE lake was full of shadow. Traffic was becoming heavy along the north drive. The offices and buildings in the Loop had let their myriad workers loose and they were on their way home. Selden first thought of taking a cab, then changed his mind. Perhaps a walk might sweep some of the cobwebs from his mind.

He walked south, toward the Loop. He didn't notice the car which had been parked around the corner of MacCooley's home. It had turned the corner when the driver saw what direction Selden took, and was coming slowly abreast of him. The car and man arrived at a street intersection simultaneously. The first thing Selden knew that something was wrong, was when a car blocked his way. He looked up in time to see a man step from the car. He started to walk around the car and the man stepped in his way. There was a gun in his hand. The gun was pointed at Selden's middle. The man said:

"Get in, bud. Fast! Before I let you have it!"

Selden got in. Immediately, the driver put on speed.

There were four men in the car, two in front and two in back. Selden was squeezed between the two in the rear seat. They both had guns for he could feel the pressure of the man's to his left. The other goon had followed him in and sat on his right. Selden looked with casual interest at the man at his left. It was the ex-pug from the Greek gambling joint. The others he had never seen.

Selden's air was casual, as if being picked up by gunsels was an everyday occurrence. But within, fingers of fear clutched at his guts. His mind was working rapid-fire. But it worked in a circle. What were their intentions? Why had they picked him up? What did they want of him? What were their

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intentions?

"Something I can do for you boys?" he asked.

"Yeah," the man on his right said. "Shut up."

"Now that isn't nice," Selden said, then grunted in pain. The ex-pug had brought his elbow into Selden's midriff, knocking the wind out of him. As Selden leaned forward, hands crossed over his belly, the same elbow hit him again, this time across the bridge of his nose, making him see stars and setting his nose to bleeding. Instinctively, Selden reached for a handkerchief. The goon on his left, prodded him with his gun and said:

"Let it leak. It's just blood."

"Yeah," Selden mumbled, as the blood seeped into his mouth. "My blood."

There was no more talk. The driver headed straight west. They were halfway across the city before the driver turned off the street they were on. Selden saw they were in a factory district now. Frame houses lined the street they were on. The houses became fewer. They hit a car line that ran on a diagonal. Empty stores, a few taverns, more empty stores, then small factories, and at last a huge warehouse, almost a block long and five stories high. It proved to be their destination.

The man beside the driver got out first. He looked around to see if the coast was clear, then started to the door of the warehouse. The rest followed, Selden sandwiched in close between the ex-pug and the other.

They entered through a side door which led directly to a freight elevator. Selden, nose still dripping blood, was shoved to the back of the elevator. The guns were in the open now. One of the men faced him and held his gun pointed menacingly. Selden counted the floors as the elevator crawled upward. They passed four doors. At the fifth they stopped.

"Get out," one of them said.

CRATED merchandise was stacked in long rows from the elevator doors to the windows at the far end of the floor. The windows had been painted black. A few small bulbs burned bare in wires hanging from the ceiling. Selden noticed that the crates were neatly stencilled, their destination being a town in Illinois.

The gun nudged him on. He moved in the footsteps of the man in front. They walked the length of the building before they turned at the last row of crates. Selden saw their destination, a row of offices whose windows stared emptily back at him. Three partitions were passed before they reached one in which frosted glass set it apart. The leader opened the door and they stepped within.

There were four men playing cards at a wide desk. They looked up at the sound of the door's opening. But as Selden was shoved into the room and forced to sit in a chair against the wall, they only vouchsafed him that single glance and continued playing. They were playing *pasetta*. The game was almost an at end. One of the men threw his hand down and shouted a vociferous cry of derision. He had won. The four stood up then; two of them stretched their arms and groaned as if they had been playing all night. The other two walked up to Selden. One of the two had his arm in a sling. The one whose arm was in a sling had a twisted grin on his face. Selden puzzled over where he had seen the man before. The dark face, cruel as falcons, hawk-nosed, thin-lipped, mean as only vengeance can make, leered down at Selden.

"Remember me?" the man asked in Bulgarian.

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"No," Selden answered in the same tongue.

The man laughed and turned to his friends who were watching the encounter with eager faces.

"See. What did I tell you? He speaks our language. Like a native, I tell you. Why last night he even fought me like he knew every move of the knife."

Selden knew then, where he had met this man. It was one of the assassins. The one whose arm he had broken. Unconsciously, Selden's glance went to that arm. The other saw his look. The leer grew more broad on the evil face.

"You like what you did?"

Selden said nothing.

There was no warning, either in look or motion. The man simply lifted his foot and kicked Selden in the groin.

Selden had never imagined pain to be so excruciating a thing. Liquid fire leaped through the whole lower part of his body. He screamed in agony, an involuntary sound; he didn't even know it passed his lips, nor did he hear the savage echoes of their voices. He knew nothing, heard nothing. Only the pain was real. Only the pain mattered. And all he wanted was for it to leave him so that he could breathe, feel life and sanity. But worse was to come.

Selden was bent over almost out of the chair. His face was the color of lead. Breath whistled thinly from his distended nostrils, animal sounds rather than human. He rolled his eyes up at the grinning brute before him. There was no expression in his eyes, just a glazed look that somehow barely managed reality. The man whose arm was in a cast backed away a few feet, brought his foot back again brought it sharply upward. There was a sickening sound as the toe met Selden's mouth.

Selden's head snapped back, blood suddenly crimsoning his whole lower jaw and splattering the man in front. Then the head fell forward. Selden knew peace at last. The kick had knocked him out. . . .

"Bah!" one of those watching said in disgust. "He is a weakling."

The ex-pug shook his head in regret. "Now if I'd a gone to work on him . . . That would have been fun watching. You're an amateur, Boris. Too quick in anger. Wait till he comes to. I'll show you how to make it last."

THE man who had given the beating looked at the unconscious Selden for an instant, lifted his head back by the hair, curled his mouth when he saw that Selden was really out, and spat in the swollen, bleeding face. He let the head fall again and walked back to the desk.

"Ah, I'm tired of *pasetta*," he said. "Who has the dice? A little *barbutte* will break the monotony."

"Look!" one of the others said. "He still sits on the chair. I think he'll be more comfortable on the floor." He shoved easily at the back of Selden's head and Selden toppled over to fall face down on the floor. They let him lie there. Dice held greater importance.

. . . There was a roaring, rushing sound in Selden's ears, as though he were in the subway. He opened his eyes and saw a neat pattern of tiled floor. There was a tiny fire ablaze in his groin. He was lying on his cheek yet he didn't feel the floor. His whole face felt numb. Men's voices came out of the fog his mind was in. He concentrated on their words. They were shooting dice. He willed his head to move. It turned stiffly, slowly. He saw that the men were gathered around a desk. They weren't aware of his return to consciousness.

He saw the edge of a door from the corner of his eye. It was partly open

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and he could see another door beyond the open one. An idea occurred to him. If he could get to that door without them seeing him, maybe he could see what there was in that office. There was a loose grin on his face as he slowly got to his knees. Then he was erect, but swaying like a reed in a stiff wind. The men were still engrossed in their game. The grin was still there as Selden walked stiff-legged toward the door. Just as he reached it, one of the players looked up and saw him. It was the ex-pug.

"Well, what do you know! Our pal's come to," he said.

He came around the desk to meet Selden. He didn't hurry. Selden didn't seem to be aware of his approach. He continued to walk in a wavering line for the door. The ex-pug waited until they were inches apart, then put a meaty hand against Selden's chest.

"Going somewhere, pal?" he asked.

"Home. Home," Selden mumbled through lips swollen so badly, the words were a mumbled sound.

"Ain't that too bad," the other said. His hand came higher, until it rested against Selden's chin. Only it was closed now. The fist moved only a couple of inches. Yet Selden's head snapped back as though it had been struck by a pile-driver. Selden staggered, then suddenly moved forward. His hands were no longer at his side. They were a pair of pistons shooting out against the fleshy chin of the other. As though Selden's blows were like those of a child, the ex-pug shook his head once, then lowered it so that some of the blows hit his thick skull, and charged in to wrap his arms around Selden.

The others, interested spectators, became participants when Selden showed life. They were eight against one. They were like animals, screaming imprecations as they shoved at each other to get at the lone man. It was the only thing which saved Selden from death at the moment.

SELDEN flew back against the frosted glass of the partition shattering it. Two of them started toward him, and stopped abruptly. A new figure had stepped into the office. It was strange that Selden, who had been aware of what was going on only through the reflexes of his tired mind and muscles, became instantly aware of the new presence.

It was a gigantic bird, an eagle. But an eagle dressed as a woman, or an imitation of a Roman senator of olden days. It was either a toga or night gown he was wearing.

The round, bird-eyes looked unblinkingly at the room's occupants. The hooked beak opened and words came from it:

"What is going on here?"

They all started explaining at once, while Selden tried to bring sanity closer to his mind. He forced himself to think coherently. The pain was a physical thing he was able to put from him. This creature's reality was too much to be either ignored or excused. In the meantime the game of question and answer was going on between the bird-man and the others.

That put them at a loss. They didn't know which should act as spokesman. The being solved their difficulty by extending a wing toward the one in the cast and saying:

"You."

"Well, it was like this. Paul, Monkey-Face and Jon met . . ."

"Never mind that," the crêature said. "I know the plan. I gave it to you fools. What has been happening here? Why has Selden been beaten?"

"He—he tried to escape," the little man bleated.

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"He's a liar," Selden said softly. The bird turned his round eyes in his direction.

"Come here, Selden," he said.

They eyed each other for a minute in a silence that seemed to last forever. At last the bird-man spoke:

"I should have asked you in the first place. These vermin don't know the smell of truth."

Selden told him exactly what happened.

"Come here," the bird-man commanded the two who had done the most damage to Selden.

Selden turned to look at them and was amazed to see the expressions of terror on their faces. Instead of complying with the command, they began to back away. But there was no place for them to go, since the bird-man blocked the only exit.

"Come here!" Once more the command. Selden noticed for the first time that there was no intonation to the voice. It uttered words in a hoarse monotone.

The two stopped their backward movements. It was as if they had become hypnotised by the bird-man. They could only stare at the creature. He walked over to them and they could only watch his approach. Suddenly his immense wings spread covering them from view. There was a quick movement of the wings toward each other. Then they fell in place again. But the two men were no longer standing.

SELDEN looked away from the two bodies on the floor. He felt nausea strike and fought it off by sheer willpower alone. For the heads of the two on the floor had been mashed together and blood and brains were a conglomerate mess of what once had been faces.

The creature walked back to Selden.

"Come with me," he said.

Selden followed him from the offices and up a narrow iron stair. It led to an immense loft which proved to be the sixth floor of the building. The bird-man opened the door to the loft and motioned for Selden to precede him. Selden walked past the threshold and stopped stock still.

It wasn't a loft at all, Selden thought. It was the most gigantic aviary he had ever seen. And flying about the huge cage were numbers of birds exactly like the one at his side. Selden turned and looked at the bird-man.

"The inner door is open. Go in," the creature said.

Selden did so. Instantly all movement was stilled on the inside. Great beaked faces turned in their direction. All those unblinking eyes, so intent on him, unnerved Selden. He could go no further than the bare inside of the cage.

There was a gentle shove at his shoulder. Then he was in the center of the cage and the birds were gathered about him in an immense circle.

"Selden," the bird who had been his guide said. "It was I who had you brought here. I didn't do it without reason."

"All right," Selden said. "What's the reason?"

"You do a radio program in which you point out the best interests of the people to them. I can use that program."

Selden puzzled over that. He asked why.

"When the time comes, the people must be told what to do, otherwise there will be panic. With you sowing the seeds we give, they will fall on fallow ground."

It was just talk, Selden knew. The bird hadn't told him of his plans. He just talked around them.

"I'm sorry," Selden said. "But you've

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got to tell me what you want of the people."

"Selden," the bird said in that same hoarse monotone that emptied of color any statement he made, "I can *make* you do what we want. Just as you saw me make two men die. But I don't like to do that. We've found that if a will is possessed against the owner's wish it is less pliable, more prone to rebel in those moments when our spell is weak. I'd rather use arguments, like money or power. They answer the purpose much better."

"Tell me," Selden asked. "What sort of beings are you? Where did you come from? What is it that you want?"

"As you see," the other answered, "we are birds. Akin to the eagle that flies your skies. But we come from another world, another universe, in fact. It is a strange world, for there the bird is master. Even the smallest has more value than man. Man is also part of our environment. But he plays a minor role. At any rate, and to save useless debate and empty talk, we decided, these ninety and I, to use our space ship for adventure. We went through space and time and landed against a rocky hillside in the mountain fastness.

"We made a mistake in our calculations. A mistake which proved to me that there is a force greater than the greatest intelligence. For our mathematicians had taken in every possibility of error. Somewhere or sometime during the transition between times and spaces, something happened. Our ship landed. We looked about, investigated, did not like what we saw, and tried to go back. Whatever impulse had taken us here had expended itself. We could only rise a few miles above the stratosphere. It wasn't enough.

"We were doomed to stay for the rest of our lives. Now look at it from our point of view. In our world we were the masters. We functioned as the power of government, as the dispensers of justice and freedom. Here we would be called and considered freaks, to be displayed in circuses and theatres. Walking, talking birds!

"What a horror to look forward to. Don't deny it! I saw it in your face, read it in your mind when first you saw me. Even now, you are making excuses for your credulity!"

SELDEN'S eyes widened. The bird had read his mind.

"Of course I can," the bird said. "It is something taught to the young, beast and man and bird in our land. Selden! When I first saw you in that cave when you came to interview Khourva, I had an idea you could be put to use."

"Then I *was* right! You were in that crevice in the rock, telling Khourva what to say."

"Of course. He has no mind, only impulses. He has a single reaction to events: physical. I have used him and his, these terrorists you saw, because they can walk the streets of your cities. We have to lie hidden here, until the night comes. Selden!"

"Yes?"

"Pay attention to what I'm saying. And stop wondering how it is that you're able to talk. I knit that broken jaw of yours and brought the swelling down, since you're so curious. It's just a matter of mind over the physical."

Selden said, "Whew!" So that was how it was done. He hadn't been paying too much attention to the odd fact that he could talk and felt no pain. More he could feel with his tongue that his lips were no longer swelling. The thought *had* crossed his mind. His eyes suddenly went bleak. All this talk by a murderer!

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"Oh, fine! Fine!" Selden exclaimed. "The bird and his fine feathers! With all the good you possess at your wing tips, and the only outlet for it is in murder."

For the first time, the creature's round eyes blinked. If Selden could have seen, all the other eyes blinked also.

"I see what you mean," the bird-man said. "But it is not quite so easy. You mean with the gifts we possess, why can't we give them to this world, teach them the right and proper way of life?"

"That's right!" Selden said heatedly.

"My friend, there have been many during the centuries, who have tried to do just that. Wars, plagues, crusades, migrations have resulted from those efforts. And the men in this world have yet to learn. There is no message any one can bring to them that they will not reject. Certainly, any message we can bring. Your argument stems from the false premise that the men in your world are thinking, coherent beings. That is why we embarked on our course. If we hold the reins of power perhaps we can force our wills on the people. Then universal good will be had and done."

"By stealing all the money in the world?" Selden asked incredulously.

"It seems to be the most important thing *in* your world. It makes nations mighty or weak. People are fat or lean because of it. Happiness is *bought*, and is produced only as a by-product of money. If the world loses all its money, then the first step has been taken towards a new evaluation of it. Another month and we will have all the money there is. The very treasure houses of this government will yield to me, and as easily as the others."

SELDEN was almost convinced, except for the one flaw in the argument.

"You might be right," he said. "And for argument's sake, let's assume you are. Now there are you who will be the rulers. You can't go back to your world to bring in others. Therefore there will come a day when you will die. Who, then, will take over the mantle of your benevolence?"

"You *are* intelligent! It is the single weakness for which there is no answer. Except in people like yourself. You must be converted to our way of thinking."

"But I am a man, not a God. And when I die, my converts will make a God out of me. There are enough Gods and religions. They have starved and beaten the world and molded it to what it has become today. I'm sorry, but I don't think I'll sit in on this hand."

The great beak opened again, but before the bird could utter a word the outer door slammed.

Selden looked around and gave a yelp of astonishment. Khourva was dragging Maris towards them. Before any of them could move to prevent it, Selden had leaped past them and out of the huge cage, to confront Khourva. All the pent-up anger of the past few hours was behind the blow he sent straight into Khourva's handsome face. There was a splattering, bone-breaking sound as his fist connected. Khourva staggered back, dropping his grip on the girl. His nose had been flattened across his cheeks and like a fountain, it spouted liquid from the wide nostrils. Selden expected to hear the sounds of taloned feet leap toward him. There was only silence, a silence broken by the bellow of Khourva's voice.

Khourva recovered his balance, and leaped toward Selden. And as he came forward, one hand pulled at something in his pocket.

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"Watch him, By!" Maris screamed. "He has a gun."

The gun was half way out of the jacket pocket. It got no further. Selden met the screaming man half way. One hand shot to the gun arm. The other reached hooking fingers around Khourva's throat. The Bulgarian raked clawing fingers down the side of Selden's face. Once, twice the finger nails tore and ripped the skin. Then Selden loosed his grip from around the other's throat and swung two hammer blows to the flattened nose. Khourva screamed in pain and brought his knee up into Selden's groin. Selden grunted and sagged at the knees. He lost his hold on the gun arm.

Khourva jumped back and yanked the gun loose, aiming it at Selden. But before he could fire, a yowling wildcat, Maris, had leaped on him from behind. He whirled, trying to shake her loose. But her arms were about his neck. It took a few seconds before he freed himself of her. Pulling her around towards him, he struck her once. She reeled back, her eyes rolling upward in semi-unconsciousness. But the few seconds grace she had given Selden proved enough.

ONCE more he and Khourva came to grips. This time, Selden feinted a punch and as the other threw up a hand to ward it off, Selden chopped down at the gun arm. The gun dropped to the floor. They were on even terms.

They circled each other, waiting for an opening. Khourva made the first move. Selden feinted once more and again Khourva made to ward the blow off. But when Selden did throw his punch, Khourva, anticipating it, sidestepped and seized the arm, twisted it into a hammer lock. At the same time he brought Selden around so that his hips were resting against Khourva's thighs. Then Khourva applied pressure. There was no doubt in Selden's mind that Khourva was going to break his arm. It would only be a matter of seconds. Selden did the only thing possible in the circumstances. He raised his leg forward and kicked backward as hard as he could.

Selden wore leather heels. The heel caught Khourva squarely on the shinbone. The Bulgarian yelped and let go his grip. Selden leaped free and turned quickly. Khourva was hopping on one leg. Selden stepped in and delivered two blows, one to the button on the left side of the chin, the other to the right button.

Khourva dropped and didn't get up.

Selden stooped and picked the gun up from the floor. Then he walked over to Maris who leaned dizzily against the wall.

"All right?" he asked.

She nodded yes.

He smiled, and suddenly stooped and kissed her. She returned the pressure of his lips. Then he turned and faced the bird-man again.

"Well," he said. "That takes care of that murdering dog."

"Yes," the creature replied. "But not completely. I made a mistake in selecting him, I realize that now. For instance it was not my purpose to have those guards and bystanders killed. After all they were hynnotised. They could not have possibly seen us. But his men are too used to murder as the best means to insure silence. When we left, they killed those people. I learned of it too late. By that time, there were several score who had died. It made no difference, then."

"And you want to rule this world," Selden said scornfully. "You and your kind. It'll be a fine world where the rulers condone murder."

Khourva stirred, rolled over and got

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first to his knees, then to his feet. He focused bleary eyes on Selden, then became aware of the turn of events. He wiped his bleeding nose on a coat sleeve, wincing with pain as he did so.

"That gun won't do you any good," he said sneeringly.

"I know it. But it's in my hand, not yours," Selden reminded him.

"Not for long. Make him give me the gun!" Khourva said, turning to the bird-man.

"It can wait," the bird-man said. "First, some questions. How did this girl get here?"

"I brought her," Khourva said.

"Why?"

"She called me and came to my office. We talked awhile about nothing much. Then I noticed that she seemd curious about what I did. That wasn't like her. I became suspicious. Then, while talking to me, her eyes fell on that file you took from Selden's office. Her eyes went wide. And I knew something was wrong. I led the talk back to what I did for my money and suggested she come and see my place. She fell for it. Now she's here."

"Very clever," the bird-man said. "First you leave incriminating evidence placed in the open—"

"I was going to put it in the vault," Khourva bleated.

"—then you kidnap this girl. No one knew of this place. But they will now. So you left a message with the butler, eh?"

Maris paled. This creature had read her mind.

"You see, Khourva, how stupid you are. But I've always told you that. Now it has been proved to you. In a little while, the wheels of the law will begin to turn. The butler will give the message to those for whom it is intended. The police will tear your office apart. And of course certain things will be found. Oh, it may take a day or two, perhaps. But no longer. Then the chase will begin. It took us a month to find this place. It took another month to prepare for our departure. Those crates you saw, Selden, contain hidden in the merchandise all the money which has been stolen . . . I must think."

"Get rid of them," Khourva said.

MARIS threw her arms about Selden in terror. She had never dreamed that what he had told her grandfather and herself was not just speculation. She looked wildly about her, saw the other gigantic birds watching them, saw the one before them pacing up and down, and knew that the real was more terrible than the fancied.

"What do you plan doing?" Selden asked.

The creature stopped his pacing and looked at Selden.

"This fool has upset everything. The first thing I am going to do is get rid of him."

Khourva heard his doom with open, unbelieving eyes.

"No. No. It was a mistake," he said.

"Correct," the bird-man said. "Your last mistake."

But Khourva was not going to wait for death, like the other two had done. He turned and leaped for the outer door. He never made it. It was incredible that so large and clumsy a bird could move so quickly. It was a hop it took rather than a jump. But whatever it was the result was the same. The jump took it clear over Khourva's head, so that the two came face to face. And Selden noted something for the first time. The bird-man had hands attached to the under side of his wings. Those wings had stretched wide to enfold the fleeing man. There was a whir-

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ring sound as the wings came together. And Selden saw the small hands clutch Khourva in a tight grip.

The wings began to slowly come apart. Maris screamed once, and fainted. Her scream was echoed by Khourva. But his was from unendurable agony. Selden found himself unable to tear his eyes from the horror he was witnessing. The bird-man was literally tearing the human apart with those terrible winged hands.

Their grip was on Khourva's shoulders and not on his throat as Selden had thought. Khourva's head was thrown back and from his open mouth came the most horrible, inhuman sounds Selden had ever heard. They might well have been the screams of the damned. Slowly the wings spread wide. And Selden retched suddenly, as the flesh began to part from the bones.

And from the outer door which had opened again, to let in the six from below, they heard the sounds of firing from somewhere in the background.

KHOURVA'S screams were echoed by the terrified shouts of his six men. As one, they leaped on the bird-man. The wings no longer opened slowly. At the onslaught of Khourva's men, they leaped apart. There was a last, tortured sound wrenched from the man's lips. Then a bleeding, torn hulk lay on the floor before Selden. He turned, sickened, and lifted Maris in his arms.

In the meantime, the six had attacked the creature with knives. They wouldn't have been a match had they used axes. The bird-man whirled and pirouetted with a speed that was fantastic. The wings struck like blinding light, throwing the men about like ten pins. And whoever was struck, never moved. There were two left at last. One had managed to get behind the creature. This one plunged a knife into the back of the bird-man. The other attempted to stab from the front. The wings swept down and enfolded the one in front and brought him close. Then the eagle head dipped down and ripped the life from the man's throat with one ferocious slash of the great beak, razor-sharp and hooked like a huge knife.

The creature whirled once more, dislodging the man on his back. The man was thrown to his knees. Instead of trying to get up, so great was his terror that he scrambled toward the door on hands and knees. The bird-man pounced on him and struck with one mighty wing. There was no more movement from the man.

The voice was still an unhurried monotone, when the bird-man turned to face Selden again.

"It seems the police have traced the girl even quicker than I anticipated," he said.

Selden cocked an ear to the sounds which were coming closer. He could distinguish the staccato sounds of a machine gun among them.

"I have some ten men down there," the bird-man said. "But I don't think they'll be enough."

Selden smiled. Maris suddenly came to life. He felt her moving and he put her on her feet. She stared with loathing at the bird-man.

"No," Selden agreed. "They won't be enough. Not now, anymore. A hundred won't be enough. Because I imagine they've called out the whole damned army to take your outfit."

The bird-man looked at the rest of his fellow creatures, still in the cage. And something clicked, like a gear falling into place, in Selden's mind. These were birds. Gigantic birds, it was true, larger than any he had ever seen. But birds, nevertheless. Yet he hadn't noticed a phenomenon natural to all birds.

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There were no loose feathers in their aviary. No bird droppings. Only where the fight had taken place was there such evidence.

"So you've solved the riddle," the creature said, and Selden imagined if it had been able to smile, it would have smiled.

"Well, I said you were intelligent. Yes, the rest of my companions were the inventions of my mind. They were replicas of myself. But since they were phantoms, they could only act as phantoms. You see, I bleed. They couldn't. And by the same token they could only act in a limited capacity. They could only do phantom acts. I had to hypnotise people into thinking they were dead. I did too. But I think the play is at end, now."

THE sounds of firing had died. It wouldn't be long before the police would arrive. Selden turned, looking for a means of escape from this creature. His jaw dropped when he saw that the cage was empty.

"They've served their purpose," the bird-man said, intercepting Selden's glance.

Before Selden became aware of the other's intentions, the bird-man stepped forward and wrested Maris from his grasp. Whirling, the creature leaped through the cage.

Selden forgot the gun in his hand. The only thought in his mind was for Maris' safety. He was a few feet behind the other as they sped the length of the cage. Straight for a small door at the other end and through it to a stair that led upward, the chase went. Selden was still those few feet behind when he got through the skylight to which the stairs had led. The bird-man was poised on the very edge of the roof. Maris struggled futilely in the grasp of the tiny hands attached to

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his wings.

Selden became aware of the gun in his hand. The creature looked at Selden and waited for him to approach.

"If you fire," he warned, "the girl and I will both fall. My talons are holding tight to the coping."

Selden was stymied. Even if the others came up, the bird-man still had the advantage. There was but one thing left: this creature had respect only for intelligence.

"That will be small revenge for what you tried," Selden said, letting the gun fall to his side.

"You are right. But the will to survive holds true on our planet," the bird-man said.

"It will not be a pleasant survival," Selden said.

"Why?"

"The birds will deny you and the humans will hunt you."

Gently, the bird-man let Maris down.

"Give me the gun," he said.

"No," Selden said smiling.

"Give me the gun." It was a command.

Selden tried to stop his feet from moving. But a power greater than his will made them walk. Selden came directly to the bird-man and handed him the gun.

"Don't worry," the creature said. "It will be used for its proper purpose. But I am a descendant of kings. It is not fit that I die in a common way. Good-bye. I am sorry that it had to end this way. It might have been a better world."

Selden watched the huge shape soar away. In a moment it was lost to sight. But he knew that somewhere, on some high peak, far from the eyes of man, this strange being would end his life. And as he put his arms around Maris and turned to go back to reality, Selden thought that perhaps this *was* a better world, as bad as it must seem to others.

THE END

THE CONQUEST OF PAIN

By Pete Bogg

SEATED around the table in a gaily lighted room of Dr. Simpson's home were three very happy gentlemen and one quite hysterical young lady. They all seemed to be having a wonderful time in their slightly inebriated condition. The girl kept repeating gleefully over and over again, "I'm an angel, Oh, I'm an angel," and was answered by a series of hearty guffaws. But on close observation it would be noted that there were no liquor bottles to be seen which might account for their drunken state. On the table was a single tumbler of liquid, and a sickeningly sweet odor filled the room. Suddenly all four were sound asleep.

This strange event took place in the year 1847 in Glasgow, Scotland. It was staged by Dr. Simpson as an experiment to judge the effectiveness of chloroform as an anesthetic. After trying it on himself in the presence of two colleagues and his young niece, he was thoroughly convinced of its worth.

Experiments in anesthesia were going on in widely separated parts of the world almost simultaneously. It had been scarcely one year before that Dr. Morton's discovery in America of ether had proved its value in a surgical operation. Morton was a medical student as well as a dentist and had discovered the amazing property of ether after an unusual series of events.

In 1880 Sir Humphry Davy in England experimented with himself in the use of nitrous oxide as an anesthetic and voiced his belief that the gas would one day be used extensively to deaden the pain of surgical operations. Forty-four years later Horace Wells of Hartford, Connecticut, began to use the gas in dentistry. When a death resulted from the anesthesia which he gave, Wells retired from practice. He reported the progress of his work to his friend and former partner, William Morton, and from that time Morton carried on the search for a safe and practical substitute for the dangerous nitrous oxide.

The industrious young dentist practiced in Boston and studied medicine at night at the Harvard Medical School. There he met Dr. Charles Jackson, and from him Morton learned of the anesthetic properties of ether. Jackson had noticed the way ether made people insensible to pain, but he had never taken advantage of this knowledge or tried to introduce it to the

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surgical field. Morton at once saw the possibilities of ether and conducted some experiments at his home, first on his dog and then on himself, to test its properties and safety noting his and the dog's reactions.

After successfully conducting a dental operation with the miracle liquid, Morton contacted Dr. Warren, who was then senior surgeon of the Massachusetts General Hospital at Boston. Morton told him of his use of ether and of his success in relieving pain, and asked for an opportunity to give a demonstration of his method on a patient undergoing a surgical operation. The date for the demonstration was set for October 16, 1846. It was a day that could mean everything to Morton.

What took place has since made medical history. On the appointed day a considerable number of doctors and students gathered in the operating room to view the test. The patient was brought in and preparations for the operation were made. Dr. Warren and his assistants, whose duty it was to hold the struggling and shrieking patient, stood about and waited for Morton, who had not arrived. Finally Dr. Warren remarked: "As Dr. Morton has not arrived, I presume he is otherwise engaged." And he was about to proceed with the operation when Morton dashed in. He had been delayed in the completion of the apparatus which he used to administer the ether. On Morton's entry Dr. Warren stepped back, indicated the man on the operating table, and said: "Well, sir, your patient is ready." Amid the silence of the spectators, surrounded by unsympathetic and even derisive faces, Morton proceeded to administer ether. In a few minutes he looked up and said, "Dr. Warren, *your* patient is ready." The incredulous audience watched in silence as the incision was made through the skin. The patient neither struggled nor cried out. The tumor was removed, and still the patient gave no sign that he was suffering any pain. At the completion of the operation Dr. Warren turned to the amazed audience and said, "Gentlemen, this is no humbug."

Morton's ether was welcomed by the medical world. For centuries mankind had been sorely in need of this pain-saving liquid. Medical science had progressed, surgeons had the tools and the knowledge with which to perform the most delicate operations, and yet before ether was discovered they were forced to work under the most unsatisfactory conditions. Their patients were subjected to indescribable tortures as harrassed surgeons endeavored to finish their brutal task in the shortest possible time. But in the light of the years that followed, years when men could cease to fear the surgeon's knife knowing they would be enjoying a painless slumber, surgery made unestimatable gains. No greater boom has ever come to mankind than the wonderful power of inducing a temporary but complete insensibility to pain.

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READER'S PAGE

GLAD DON IS BACK

Sirs:

Just finished reading the May issue of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES and I am glad Don Wilcox is back. "The Land of Big Blue Apples" was very good. He has a light, airy style of writing which is a pleasure to read.

Rod Ruth's illustration was very good, too. In fact, he is the best artist you've got, except for the few and far between illustrations of Finlay. Let's have more of Rod Ruth.

Speaking of pics, M. Smith's pic on pages 166-167 looked very much like a hold-over from one of your detective mags. How about that?

"Finished By Hand" didn't seem to me to be a fantasy at all. It seems out of place in FA.

Next was "The Sword and the Pool," very good fantasy, as was "Christopher Crissom's Cravat."

The rest were just fair.

McCauley's cover painting was superb! Tell me, which comes first, the picture or the story? Probably the picture, because many times the illustration doesn't follow the story.

Thomas Jewett
670 George St.
Clyde, Ohio

Yes, Don seems to have done very well with his latest story! As for the illustration by Smith, we just couldn't find a better scene to illustrate. Some stories just do not have actual fantasy gadgets in them, and we must have illustrations of the characters themselves in some dramatic moment. We thought "Finished By Hand" had a rather terrific fantasy ending, with the sort of punch that O. Henry made famous. In paintings, sometimes the cover comes first. In this story it did. And when the art department sees a chance to make a cover more dramatic by changing it a bit, we do not object, nor do our readers. Indeed, they delight in paintings such as this—you being a point in demonstration of that fact.—ED.

A SUPREME CHALLENGE

Sirs:

For the first time since I met you personally at the CHICON in 1940 I must congratulate you on one of your stories.

"An Adam from the Sixth" by Richard S. Shaver in the May FANTASTIC ADVENTURES is truly mature stuff.

In a day when so many fans (the group of less than 200 called "fandom"—Ed.) are harping that the Ziff-Davis fantasy magazines are printing juvenile stuff you have run a story which is a supreme challenge to their cries. I want to thank you for giving all of us a chance to read it.

Richard Frank
342 Susquehanna St.
Williamsport 15, Pa.

We are always glad to hear from an old friend. We well remember the Chicon and the great success it was. Naturally we are delighted to know that you found Richard S. Shaver's first "fiction" story in FANTASTIC ADVENTURES *so good. It should prove to the fans that we have the most versatile and accomplished writers it is possible to get. Have you noticed the tremendous sensation Mr. Shaver has made in* Amazing Stories, *our sister magazine, with his intriguing stories of the caves and of the earth's amazing past? If not, you should read them. You will find them as good as "An Adam from the Sixth" in every respect. You will forgive us for our editorial insert in your letter, but it is an error to say that "so many fans" harp about our juvenile stories. Quite the reverse is true. The fans who harp are what is termed the "lunatic fringe" and there are less than 200 of them among our total readership of 500,000 fans. In fact, the "fans" who harp admit they have not read a copy since 1940. Those were the good old days, Mr. Frank, when science fiction fan groups read the magazines they based their groups on.*—ED.

F. A. IS HIS FAVORITE

Sirs:

Just finished the May issue of F. A. and I think that "The Land of Big Blue Apples" is the best in months. Let's have some more of the Richard S. Shaver shorts. "An Adam from the Sixth" is great. F. A. is one of my favorites and *Amazing Stories* runs a close second.

My first *Amazing* was some years ago which featured a story about the robot "Adam Link." Can you tell me who was the author of Adam Link?

A. Johnson
c/o Shell
764 Manhattan Ave.
Brooklyn 22, N. Y.

Adam Link is the creation of Eando Binder, and sadly (to us) Mr. Binder is today engaged in grinding out tons of comic book script, and allowing Adam Link to rust in his undeserved graveyard. We wish Mr. Binder would get "sen-

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timental" one of these days and do another Adam Link for us.—ED.

"BEATS THEM ALL"

Sirs:

Of all the Martian stories that I have read in 15 years of reading science fiction, "The Land of Big Blue Apples" beats them all! After reading it once, I can't tell if it is good or just corny but it is appealing. Perhaps the dawning post-war era is at last breaking the monotony of the last five years.

The rest of the stories and shorts are up to the usual standard.

Conrad B. Peterzen
2012 6th Ave. E.
Hibbing, Minn.

There is an interesting story behind Mr. Wilcox's "Blue Apple" story. It seems he took his notebook to a school classroom and asked the pupils what kind of a story they would like to read, and from then on it was the class's job to plot his next novelet—and you can see from this department how popular their plot turned out to be under the masterful hand of the great Don Wilcox. Don writes a story for children and grown-ups alike, which is the secret of his popularity.—ED.

TRIPE—BUT NOW HE'S HAPPY

Sirs:

I'm an old fantasy fan from way back when Merritt, Burroughs, Kline, Taine *et al* were in their heyday. Lately I have been reading the tripe dished out as fantasy simply out of sentimentality. The new authors seem so adolescent an puerile and the old masters have degenerated into hackneyed pot-boilers. Pelkie's much publicized opus would be twice as good if half as long. I think the guy must be a lawyer, he has such a redundancy of words. The same goes for Shaver. In fact his "An Adam from the Sixth" is really good because it's short.

Which brings us down to date. I have just finished the May issue and am really happy. Don Wilcox has what it takes and his "Land of Big Blue Apples" is equal to any of those he used to write. I enjoyed every line.

I don't know if Berkeley Livingston is a new author or not, but "The Sword and the Pool" really rang the bell. If he can keep up that standard, you have a real author.

The other shorts are good, but not outstanding, and the cover is a work of art.

Elfie M. Knox
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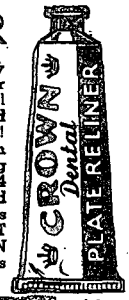

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DEATH'S FURY

By

C. P. HOLMESBY

ONE of the great marvels of the universe is that man, once he appeared upon the earth, managed to survive the destructive forces which surged about him. He fell victim to the ferocious animals of the jungle, to starvation, and to disease. But his mental prowess gave him the necessary weapons to defeat the savage beasts; he domesticated animals, raised crops, and managed to assure himself a stable food supply. The ravages of disease constituted a far more dangerous foe—and in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries it appeared as though the human race was fighting a losing game. Terrifying epidemics swept through all of the civilized world.

One of the most cruel and crippling maladies was St. Anthony's Fire, later known as erysipelas. It was not until 1597 that the scourge was checked when men learned that mildew rye was responsible. Leprosy and smallpox took their toll in hundreds of thousands. All afflictions were blamed on supernatural forces, even the dreaded typhus plague. Typhus was a disease of war and famine, of prisons and jails and ships, and of medieval cities. Lice carried the germ from one sufferer to the next. That bit of knowledge was not gained until the twentieth century, coming barely in time to prevent the spread of the disease in World War I.

In the sping of 1347 the bubonic plague came out of Asia and fastened its death clutch on the entire European continent. It spread in all directions with the movements of peoples; increased trade and troop movements in the Hundred Years' War brought it into heretofore untouched areas. Early in 1348 it had extended over southern France, Italy and Spain. In June it reached Paris; in August, Britain and Ireland. The Netherlands, Germany, Scandinavia, and Russia all cringed under its blow. Terror gripped the hearts of a stricken humanity leaving them demoralized and completely shaken. They could not cope with the havoc that had dropped into their midst being ignorant of the medical knowledge which could have saved them. Instead, they attempted to flee. Boats were hurriedly boarded and set out to sea, but often the occupants found themselves with the plague in their midst. Boats were known to be drifting with only dead and dying aboard. Many left their families and sought immunity in the cathedral only to pray until the disease reached and killed them there.

This overwhelming calamity destroyed every semblance of order which had held the community together. Law and order disappeared, and many gave themselves up to the doctrine, "Let us eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we shall die." It was during this all-consuming epidemic that the

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plague was named the "Black Death," because of the dark areas formed by minute hemorrhages which appeared in the skin of those affected.

During the fourteenth century, in Europe alone, twenty-five million people fell victims to the disease, a number which constituted about one-fourth of the entire population of the continent. The cities were in a horrible state; the dead and dying blocked the streets. The corpses were carted away in some cases by convicts and condemned prisoners, to be thrown into huge pits or into the sea. And there was often the ghastly spectacle of piles of bodies on the seashore which had been washed back by the roaring waves.

Ignorance and superstition played their dual role in the feeble efforts a dying people made to rid themselves of the Black Death. The cause of the disease was unknown. On a day in 1630 the commissioner of health of Milan, Italy, was observed walking down the street writing from an ink-horn at his belt and wiping his ink-stained fingers against the walls of houses. The ignorant townspeople accused him of smearing the houses with virus of the plague. They took their complaint to the City Council, and the commissioner was arrested and tortured. At that time torture of suspects was a ceremonial procedure prescribed by law. In great pain the Commissioner tried to save himself from further torment by confessing he had spread the plague. Names of his supposed accomplices were forced from his lips, and two others were innocently condemned. Their death was as slow and as horrible as can possibly be imagined. The victims were torn with red-hot pincers, had their right hands cut off, their bones broken, were stretched on the wheel, and after six hours of suffering were burned. Their ashes were thrown into the river and their possessions sold. As final retribution, the house which had been touched with ink was razed, and on its site a column was erected to commemorate the part these men were supposed to have played in the spread of the plague.

When the source of the pestilence was still a mystery, quarantine was resorted to in order to check its spread. The physicians tried to protect themselves by means of leather suits with leather gauntlets and masks with glass coverings for the eyes. They attributed the disease to infected vapors or "ill winds" which entered the skin through open pores. The discovery of the source of Bubonic plague did not some until modern times, and then medical men found it to be a bacterial disease of rats which was transmitted to man by fleas. The London Fire of 1666 did for England what men had been powerless to do. It destroyed the infected rats and brought an end to the plague in that country.

Greatly depleted in numbers, humankind still populated the earth. The light of knowledge on medical problems enlarged from a tiny ray to a brilliant flaring torch in the later years, to protect and increase the life span of every inhabitant of the globe.

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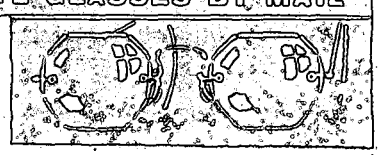

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STORIES of the STARS

By ALEXANDER BLADE

Stars are suns like our own. Antares, in Scorpio may have its family too

ANTARES is a familiar star in the heavens. It is as red as Mars, and is often confused with that world. It is 186 million miles in diameter, 215 times the size of our sun, 710 times as bright, and is 163 light years distant. After all those figures, you should have the idea that here is a sun which might well have a family of planets of far greater magnitude than our solar system. It well might have twenty or thirty planets, many of them capable of sustaining life.

Technically, Antares lies in Scorpius, which is the ninth brightest constellation, and is located between sixteen and eighteen hours of right ascension and between —20° and —40° declination. This group of stars is consequently visible in the southern sky in the evening hours during the summer months.

Antares is not such a hot sun as others, but it has a radiant energy of more than 3,000 times as fast as the sun. Due to this factor, it is difficult to give the exact distance of the star, and some authorities place it in excess of 300 light years.

Antares is the largest star known, having a diameter of 90,000,000 times that of our sun.

According to Greek legend, Scorpius is the monster which killed Orion and frightened the horses of the sun so that Phaeton was thrown from his chariot when attempting to drive them. The word Antares, (anti Ares) means opposed to, or rivaling Mars, the red planet associated with the god of war.

Artist Frank R. Paul has pictured a scene on one of the planets which circle this star. First he has pictured Antares as a giant red sun filling a great portion of the heavens, and radiating its heat and radiant energy in great waves which form a brilliant and spectacular corona.

Next he has pictured the landscape as being rugged, and filled with enormous crystalline formations which assume fantastic shapes.

The inhabitants of this planet he has pictured as being of two kinds, a web-footed creature which might, by a stretch of imagination, resemble a tree toad. This creature can live in the water, or live in its conical houses designed to prevent other forms of life from entering. The second type of inhabitant is a carnivorous flower-like being which swarms over the planet, devouring all animal life in its path. To visitors from earth, the scene would present little of attractiveness beyond its exotic strangeness.

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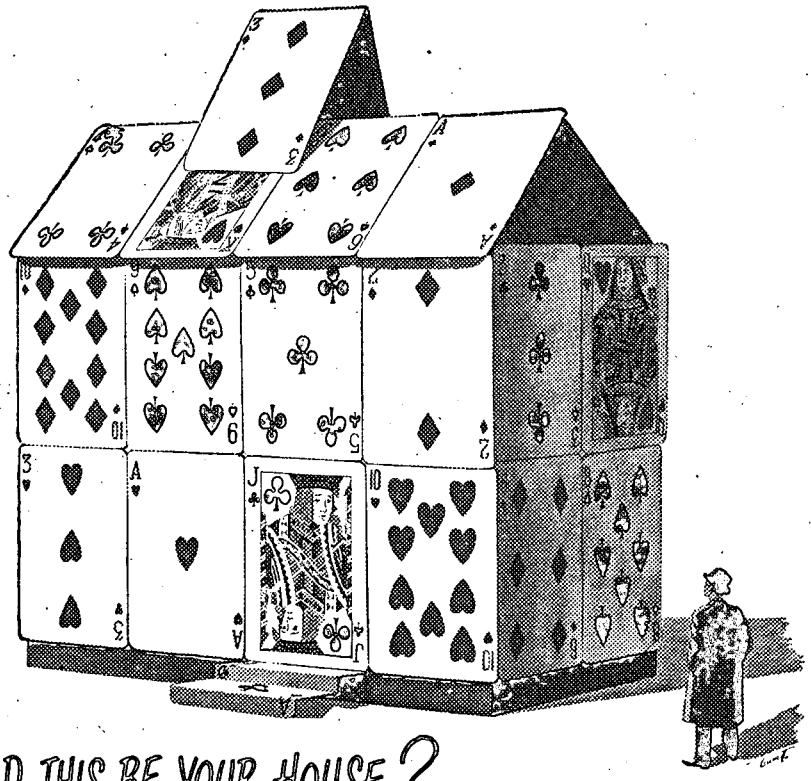

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